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WITH HELP FROM LOCAL AGENCIES, EXPRESSIVE ARTISTS MOVE BEYOND THEIR CHALLENGES

## A WAY TO TELL THEIR STORIES

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Boston Museum of Contemporary Art



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# THE ART OF SELF-EXPRESSION

WITH HELP FROM LOCAL SERVICE AGENCIES, EXPRESSIVE ARTISTS MOVE BEYOND THEIR CHALLENGES

BY MINDY POLLACK-FUSI | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Some cope with mental, emotional, intellectual, or physical limitations. Others live with addictions, or are homeless. Still others deal with developmental disabilities. And every single one of them pursues a passion for art.

Now, the work of more than 25 expressive artists, who produced their art in conjunction with social service organizations, beautifies the walls in a permanent collection of 35 pieces at Mercantile Bank's recently renovated Fenway branch office.

While the art includes many styles, the term "expressive arts therapy" best defines it. This type of art encourages challenged individuals to "externalize internal landscapes — things you can't always find words for," said Linda Dolph, an expressive art therapist who runs the art studio at Boston's St. Francis House, which provides services for poor and homeless adults in Boston.

Expressive art therapy gives people a place where they feel comfortable expressing themselves. "The art process in itself is healing," Dolph said. "Although the artists often end up with beautiful products, it's the process that's really most significant in art therapy."

Some of the Mercantile Bank artists received direct proceeds from the sales. In other cases, purchase prices supported local nonprofit programs. Each piece of art sold for between \$100 and \$900. In total the bank paid \$13,000.

"[The art] is thoroughly impressive and very, very meaningful," said Mercantile Bank president Charles Monaghan, whose wife, Diane, introduced him to the art form. She joined the bank's social responsibility committee, which oversaw art selections.

"We wanted to enhance the bank's office environment," said Diane Monaghan, "while at the same time assisting local artists in their individual healing and recovering process."

Artist Loretta Jarak, 67, created two acrylic portraits at St. Francis House that now hang in offices in the bank entryway. Jarak, who faces a number of emotional and physical challenges, expresses the importance of making art in these lines: "Colorful lines, colorful people, laughing, crying, a place to express emotions I thought I never had. A bit of joy in a cold world, breaking through my illness to a calmer corner in my life. A place to live out my dreams," she writes. In high school, she received many art awards and graduated from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts. Now, she lives in transitional housing and is grateful for this program.

Then there's Wanda Metcalf, 60, who started making art when she was 3, graduated from the University of New Hampshire with a degree in art and biochemistry, but hasn't worked a salaried position in 20 years because of difficulties associated with her Asperger's syndrome.

Experimenting with art "is who I am," Metcalf said. She was

invited to join the exhibit after her watercolors were discovered at an Asperger's Association of New England show. Now she is affiliated with ArcWorks, a program that's part of the Northeast Arc in Danvers, which provides opportunities for individuals with challenges to explore and discover their creative abilities and express themselves through the arts.

Efon Elad, 68, originally from Cameroon, once was "living well" while working as a quality tester. But after he lost his job he picked up painting — which had been a childhood passion. Now he lives with his brother, and at St. Francis House's art studio, he relearned how to mix colors.

"Three days after, I started and never stopped and didn't look back," Elad said. When the bank bought two vibrant paintings — including a playful, imaginary vacation spot in Cameroon — he invested the money in other art materials.

And it's not the first time many of the artists have sold their work.

Janice Mahoney, 51, makes art at the Creative Union Gallery in Somerville as part of a day program at Walnut Street Center, which provides support services to adults with developmental disabilities. Mahoney, who first sketches with colored pencil and paper and then transfers her designs onto canvas with acrylic paint, has shown her work at Somerville Museum, Boston Cyclorama, and Spaulding Rehabilitation Center, as part of

Creative Union Gallery's community offsite exhibitions.

Gregory Trakimas, 23, whose medium is digital photography, once held a one-man show at Northeast Arc's The Gallery at Southside in Danvers. At 17, while attending the LABBB special needs program at Lexington High School, he sold photos at a fund-raiser at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. Trakimas, who works part time at Hunt's Photo and Video in Melrose, says he feels great about his photography and doesn't feel he has "a disability, because of the fact that I work at a job that I like and I'm into photography."

Then there's Dante Gandini, 56. He once studied art history at Indiana University and owned an art and antiques gallery before falling on hard times. Now he sells his work on Boston Common, at coffee shops, and at Boston-area and Florida galleries. He also curates for Common Art, a program at Ecclesia Ministries Common Cathedral in

Boston, which encourages the homeless to develop their artistic abilities.

Gandini describes himself as "prolific," painting 250 pieces a year.

"I'm an artist, that's all I care to do. I paint," Gandini said. He sheepishly admits he paints "iconic Boston" — popular, easily recognizable locales to increase the odds that the works will sell. He also paints in Gloucester, and occasionally on the Florida coast when he finds "the means and methods." He attends the expressive arts program at St. Francis House for four hours most weekdays. Dante's striking painting of Fenway Park that hangs in the bank is being sold in a limited edition print through ArcWorks. He will split the profits with the agency.

"St. Francis House has totally blessed me," Gandini said. He walks a Mercantile Bank visitor outside and points down Lansdowne Street to share a scene he's eager to paint. "I see art

almost everywhere. I see things. I see beauty everywhere."

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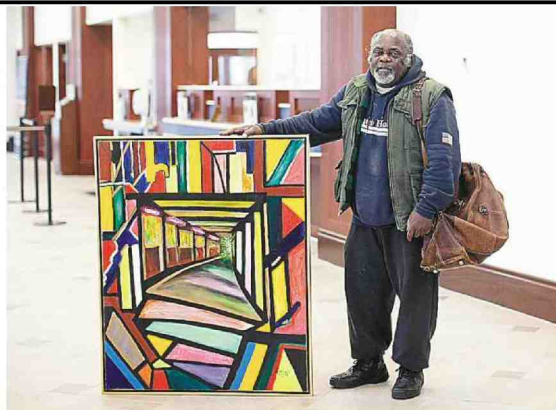
LINDA DOLPH

**Expressive art therapist who runs the art studio at St. Francis House**



YOON S. BYUN/GLOBE STAFF

Artist Loretta Jarak created two acrylic portraits at St. Francis House that hang in offices at Mercantile Bank.



PHOTOS BY YOON S. BYUN/GLOBE STAFF

Efon Elad (top) and Dante Gandini (middle, with art therapist Linda Dolph) attend the expressive arts program at St. Francis House. Wanda Metcalf (above) is affiliated with ArcWorks, a Danvers arts program for individuals with challenges.