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FEATURED SPOTLIGHT

Lynden man creates Rorschach-like in appearance drawings (with photo gallery)

By Bill Helm Editor Apr 19, 2024 Updated Apr 19, 2024



Lynden resident Paul Niemi talks about his work on display at the Jansen Art Center. On Wednesday, April 10, several of the area's artists had a sneak peek at the Jansen Art Center's spring juried exhibit. (Bill Helm/Lynden Tribune)



Jansen Art Center
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On Wednesday, April 10, several of the area's artists had a sneak peek at the Jansen Art Center's spring juried exhibit. (Bill Helm/Lynden Tribune)

Paul Niemi is one of 37 artists with work on display in Jansen Art Center's spring juried exhibit

LYNDEN — Paul Niemi has attention deficit disorder, ADD for short. Niemi also has a keen ability to draw. However, it's not drawing that was the Lynden man's introduction to art.

A self-proclaimed performer all his life — in music and in the theater — Niemi said he gravitated toward art the past 10-15 years.

Once upon a time when he lived in New York City and in New Mexico, Niemi conjured up large masks of screen, mache and acrylic paint. He said those pieces have similar elements seen in his drawings on display in the Jansen Art Center's spring exhibit.

On exhibit from April 11 through June 22, the Jansen's juried spring show has work from 37 artists.

Through May 23, The J will also show work from students across Whatcom County in its Promising Futures exhibit.

Through June 22 The J also has scheduled two individual exhibits, one by Amirah Chatman the other by Lori VanEtta.

Depending on mood

Niemi, a resident of Whatcom County on and off for the past 20 years, but full-time the past six years, said his four ink on paper drawings "really came out of traumatic life events last year that forced me to deal with all the emotions I was feeling."

"At the time, an artist friend in Friday Harbor told me to draw my feelings out," Niemi said. "So I picked up pen and paper and began to draw. Rorschach-like in appearance, my drawings done primarily in black ink on white archival paper come straight from my subconscious."

Depending on his mood, Niemi might add colored pen or pencil to his work.

"I have done some drawings on articles of clothing and even a copper bracelet I made this year in a class at the J," he said. "After I began to draw, my pieces immediately revealed their own language and vocabulary, so when I showed them to people, they were easily able to find something in them that they identified with. No two people see the same thing."

In his artist's statement Niemi wrote that ADD is not a disability "but a beautiful key to a portal of the mind where only a few are able to go and navigate."

"The relative world can often create mental chaos, anguish and isolation," Niemi wrote. "But in the ADD world, the mind analyzes every detail over and over until familiarity forces consciousness to join with eyes and hands to create something so unfiltered that to speak it might cause angst. Images shout from the page with a unique perspective. The spectator suspends judgment and allows the artist to be seen and heard. No longer caged up like a misunderstood savage, thoughts elicit empathy, pain, and humor."

Niemi said he hopes the opportunity to show his work at the Jansen Art Center is the first of many times and also "a message to others that art saves lives and that trusting oneself, shutting out the naysayers and external toxicity to focus on what moves you is the key to finding your passion and living a fulfilling life."

"I draw every day and the work just keeps on coming," Niemi said. "I guess I'm a visual artist. Who knew?"

Juried exhibits at the Jansen Art Center rotate seasonally and showcase artists of all calibers and mediums.

Artists are invited to submit as many as four pieces for consideration by a rotating jury made up of artists, curators and other members of the regional arts community.

The Jansen Art Center is at 321 Front St., Lynden.

Hours are 11 a.m. until 7 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday, 11 a.m. until 5 p.m. Friday and Saturday.

Call 360-354-3600 for more information.

-- Contact Bill Helm at bill@lyndentribune.com.

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