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# ReVision Arts Exhibit “Please Touch: Together Breaking Barriers” Creates Unique, Accessible Arts Experience

Tristan Scott, Volunteer Reporter

The top floor of King Street Station, just a mile and a half from campus, serves as the current home for ReVision Arts’ decade-old traveling exhibit “Please Touch: Together Breaking Barriers.” The exhibit includes a huge variety of art, from sculptures to paintings, classical to modern.

The unique twist, however, is that visitors are encouraged to touch each and every piece of art.

The gallery is large and open, with a muted, industrial aesthetic broken up by vibrant pops of color and texture coming from the many pieces of art. A large screen hangs in the back providing audio descriptions of each piece. Additionally, braille brochures are provided at the entrance



Evelynn Labriola

The ARTS front desk perched at the entrance to the second floor.



The King Street Station stands in the middle of downtown.

along with plaques accompanying each piece.

My eyes (and hands) were immediately drawn to Stoned Patti O’s piece “Covid Kid,” a three-foot-tall mannequin covered in multicolored rhinestones. Not only was it appealing to look at, the texture was exciting and unique to feel. The rhinestones subverted the expectation of smooth, faceless mannequins, giving this typically faceless being a personality that shows through when touched.

This piece stood out to exhibit curator Barbara Oswald as well. Oswald is the founder and director of ReVision Arts as well as a community organizer and activist working to create space for people with disabilities within the art community.

“That artist, Patti O, has seen the ‘Please Touch’ show over the last few years, so I was familiar with her work. You know, those of us with

low vision are really attracted to bling. So when I saw the sparkle, I knew we had to ask her,” Oswald said.

Patti O, like a number of artists approached by ReVision, was hesitant to have her art touched.

"Many of the artists have shared that, you know, when they were first approached, they were like, no, not going to touch the art. No, no, art is fragile. No, no, no," Oswald said.

However, Oswald explained that seeing the positive impact the exhibit has had over the years on sighted and non-sighted patrons alike has convinced many artists to participate.

"As we were curating we were recognizing what barriers currently exist, and one of them is the cultural barrier that says, 'don't touch the art.' When people are able to get both a visual and a sensory opportunity, the gift of that allows you to have a much deeper interaction with the art," Oswald expressed.

A typical gallery is inaccessible to those with little or no vision, preventing them from experiencing art or being able to picture themselves as artists. This breaking down of barriers is exactly the point of the exhibit, as it creates a space for visitors to have this experience of interacting with art potentially for the first time.

"For me, it's almost more meaningful to be able to touch and connect with a piece with my own two hands. It made me wonder what parts of the piece the artist kept coming back to, because certain spots on the artwork were more appealing for me to touch," third-year Anai Quintanilla said after visiting the exhibit.

Quintanilla's experience reflects the tactile experience the exhibit provides, which can create a much deeper understanding and personal connection with the art. Comparing the smooth, cool metal of Pieter VanZanden's "Big Shrimp" against the soft plush fur of Debra Broz's "Dress Up as Yourself: Rabbit" gives the visitor much more to think about than if they had solely viewed the pieces.

Tesla Kawakami, the visitor services coordinator for ARTS At King Street, gets to see these visitor reactions first hand.

"People are really excited that they get to touch it. There were a lot of people with low or no vision at the opening that came specifically for this, and it's been really cool seeing how that has impacted their experience of the art gallery world. It's just been really sweet to have different types of people being able to appreciate the show who normally wouldn't be able to access it," they said.

Oswald's own experiences as someone who was born with limited vision led her to prioritize the need for accessibility in the world of art.

"I had the opportunity to study art in Vienna when I was in college, which gave me a chance to understand that I was absolutely as artistic as anyone else," she said. "When I came home, my advisor said, you know, 'you have talent as an artist, but as a person who's blind you're isolated, and to do art you're going to be more isolated because you have to spend a lot of time alone.' So at that point, I decided, 'Ok, I will pursue art as my career, and I will figure out how to have my art be people.'"

Oswald proceeded to spend her career working with people with a wide range of disabilities through art as well as legislation and activism.

"Part of the oppression that comes with ableism comes when you're looked at as not capable. You know, it's also a barrier that needs to be broken," she said.

"Please Touch" tells a story of creativity and resilience. The exhibit showcases a wealth of diversity from artists of all abilities and provides an experience unlike any other.

"Please Touch: Together Breaking Barriers" can be seen for free at the top floor of King Street Station. The exhibit is running through the end of December 2024.