

Jim Gillespie
RACSB Director

I am interested in organizing a formal art show for the RACSB. In my short time with the RACSB, I have spoken with a number of consumers (mostly at the Kenmore Club) who have expressed an interest and occasional involvement with art. It was more recently brought to my attention that an art therapist works at Snowden and the Kenmore Club is hosting two therapeutic art sessions this month (led by Jennifer W.). Reports of this are fueling my ambition to get an art show organized. Rather than letting this idea get ahead of me, I wanted to run the idea by you.

I envision an exhibit that includes the artwork of persons with mental illness, mental retardation, substance abuse problems, and even artwork recreationally done by RACSB staff. There is a strong possibility that the show could be held in the early summer of 2005 at the University of Mary Washington's Dupont Gallery (on campus, just off of College Avenue). While attending Mary Washington, I worked as the student gallery manager under Tom Somma, director of the galleries. I am confident that my rapport with Tom and my experience in organizing and installing exhibits could guide this endeavor.

Through a well-organized exhibit, residents and visitors to the Fredericksburg community could readily witness the RACSB's commitment to supporting the creativity of the populations it serves. Persons with mental illness, mental retardation, substance abuse problems, (and even staff) would have a forum to feel proud of their talents and abilities. Everyone who sees the show will walk away with a unique frame of reference and new understandings of the people RACSB services.

Now for a few particulars... To protect the identity of the artists who participate, all of the artwork (from consumers and staff alike) could be labeled on a first name basis or through the use of initials. Staff could train and assist persons with mental illness, mental retardation, and substance abuse problems in performing some basic gallery functions once the show is open to the public. Consumers could also assist in distributing fliers announcing the show, just as many have done in helping to promote Red Cross blood drives.

How much would something like this cost? The costs for this art show would include labeling sheets (no more than \$15), fliers (could be printed internally), catering of some kind (food is a big draw for art openings), and framing supplies that some consumers might not have at their disposal or be able to afford. It is likely that some local art supply/framing businesses could assist us. The Dupont Gallery supplies us with professional track lighting, pedestals for 3-Dimensional work, a foyer area, and all of the supplies needed for the installation of the show.

I would be more than happy to meet with you personally and discuss this proposal in more detail. Hanging the show itself would take less than a week. But getting a body of artwork together and coordinating efforts with interested staff etc. will certainly take longer. This is why I have chosen to inform you well in advance. Thanks for taking the time to consider this idea and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Bill Hartland MHRS

Summary of Where we Are

Saturday (1/8) I spoke with Tom Somma, Director of the UMW galleries, to see where the art exhibit stands. He enthusiastically confirmed that UMW will officially host the show and that the month of May is wide open. Tom suggested extending the show's duration into the first weekend of June, UMW alumni weekend. Additionally, he offered to assist with exhibition announcements and reminded me that the UMW galleries have 30+ spare frames (light finish) we are welcome to temporarily use (provided entries are matted). I have forwarded a copy of this update to him (void of any mention of consumer names etc.) welcoming any other suggestions he might have.

Basic Order of Operations

- 1) Hash out some of the points/concerns described below. (Tuesday 1/11)
- 2) Begin advertising for submissions and meeting individually with potential artist contributors. (Posters at the Kenmore Club, outreach letters to KC members, fliers through RS staff, and announcements in RACSB bulletin)
- 3) Make catering arrangements. Heather Conklin indicated that Outback Steakhouse would likely cater the event for free if we give adequate notice and an estimated turnout for opening night. Erma Brault mentioned the possibility of having Applebees cater.
- 4) Contact the Free Lance Star (...Richmond Times Dispatch, Washington Post...)
- 5) Examine work submitted by first submission deadline (set around mid/late February. SEE BELOW). Decide how much more work we need. If needed, advertise for a second submission deadline (late March). Again meet with artists to see if/how their work is progressing and if they are in need of additional materials. (i.e. I have plenty of drawing supplies, colored pencils etc. that I no longer need).
- 6) Send out announcements/invitations (to consumers, RACSB staff, UMW faculty/administration, local clubhouses, et.al) Transport interested consumers (esp. those who have submitted work) to the Dupont Gallery to give them a feel for the gallery setting.
- 7) Have artwork matted and framed. Prepare labels (Tom has offered to print these if we provide him with label information and acetate sheets). Brief artist statements?
- 8) Install the show at least one week in advance of the opening.

Questions for Discussion

(to be discussed Tuesday . I have included my opinions to provide context, but I encourage you to assert your own and raise additional concerns.)

When will the show open in May and how long will it run?

Usually art shows open on Fridays...If not a Friday, then a Wednesday would be my next choice. As to how long the show runs...this becomes a big question...The Dupont Gallery usually closes at the end of the Spring Semester only to be used again the following Fall. The shows are monitored by student volunteers. Since students will be home on Summer break, we will need to furnish our own volunteers to monitor the gallery when it is open to the public. Fortunately, we can determine what the gallery hours will be for the duration of the show. The Ridderhoff-Martin Gallery is open through the summer MWF from 10-4 and Sat/Sun 1-4. We could have the Dupont Gallery open MWF i.e. for a window of time within the 10-4 1-4 window.

Should the show include work of both MH and MR program consumers?

I am leaning towards just MH for 2 reasons. 1) Combining work of both MH and MR could perpetuate common misunderstandings of what mental illness is versus what mental retardation is. I have run into a number of educated people who confuse schizophrenia for DID. Others commonly think that having a mental illness automatically means a significantly diminished mental capacity. 2) So far, the exhibit seems to have generated a lot of interest at the Kenmore Club and I have seen and heard of promising work.

How should work be selected?

Big question. For starters, it would be a good idea to include some common conditions/guidelines for submission: original artwork (drawings, paintings, sculptures, prints, photographs, collages, weavings), NO coloring book pictures, NO paint by number etc. Right now, I'm also thinking of having a preliminary submission deadline, say mid-February. This will serve 2 purposes. 1) It will give me a better idea of how much work we have for the gallery space. This in turn will help guide how much more campaigning we need to do to get work submitted. 2) A preliminary deadline will also give me an opportunity to get a more accurate bearing on the quality of the artwork. I think it is feasible for everyone who submits work to have at least one piece in the show. This does not mean that all artwork submitted will be accepted from each entrant. Jerry Galbreth has shown me nearly 20 drawings that he has done over the last 2 months. Haven Schrechengost has produced close to 50 small concrete faces. He and I have been dialoguing since October about his work. The point is that the show is not only a forum to showcase the talents of consumers but also an opportunity to challenge a few of these artists with discretion.

Should the show be juried and awards given? If so, who will jury? If awards, who will provide these?

I'm on the fence with this one. Awards could draw a larger consumer audience. On the other hand, it could potentially sour the intrinsic importance of the show..

Should consumers be allowed to assist in installing the exhibit (will likely take 5-7 days) or should staff do this on consumers' behalf?

In either case, I think that it would be helpful if consumers were given the opportunity to visit the gallery before the opening (whether public or private). This could help them feel more comfortable with the gallery setting. I would be willing to help transport interested consumers for this purpose.

Should there be a private opening (for consumers and RASCB staff) as well as a general public opening?

I am leaning towards first having a public opening. Then for those consumers that weren't able to make it out or felt uncomfortable being in the open public, they could go on their own thereafter or perhaps a few groups could be transported there.

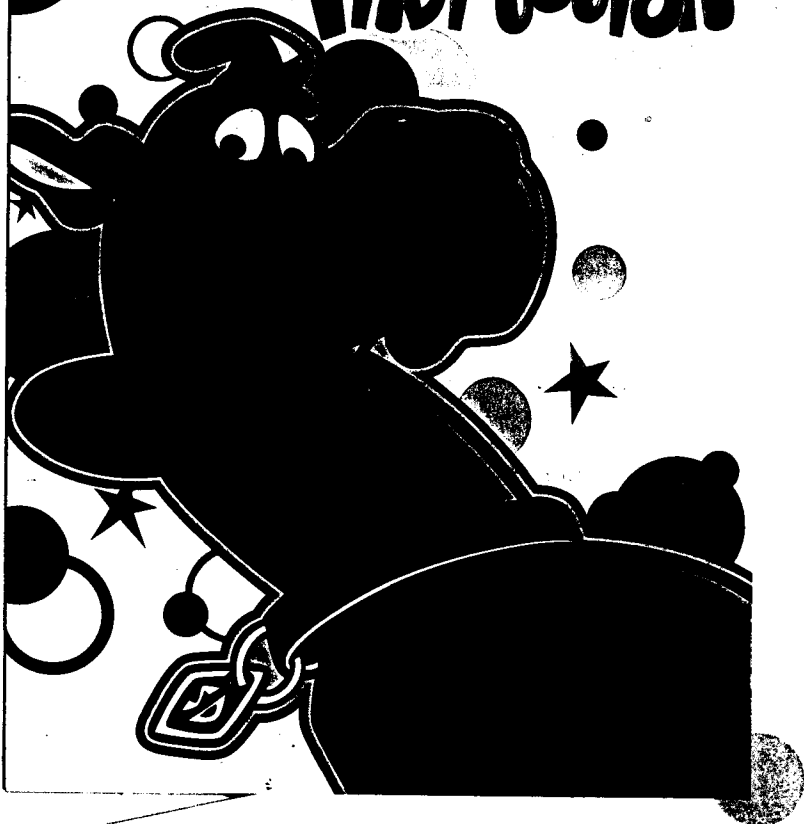
How can non-artist types contribute?

- The Kenmore Club already does a good job in organizing efforts from different skill and interest levels to accomplish tasks. In order for this show to be a success, consumers could have guided ownership over publicity (flier creation and distribution etc.), creating a theme for the show, and mailing invitations to members and local clubhouses etc.
- For those with little to no artistic inclinations, I have brainstormed the possibilities of having one section of a gallery wall devoted to self-portrait sketches. This is not as involved as it sounds. Interested consumers could be guided through the simple expression exercise of drawing themselves with pencils, crayons, colored pencils, collage etc. ("Draw a picture of yourself" is the prompt commonly used).
- Written language in art/ as art is becoming a more accepted means of artistic expression. I envision using a sizable canvas as a kind of storyboard for consumers to respond to a simple theme prompt i.e. 'Why art is important to me' Other ideas??
Another spinoff on the storyboard idea could be to have a sizable canvas with a commonly identified work of art in the center. Interested consumers can then be asked to write on the canvas their response...what they see in the painting, drawing, photograph etc. I think this has the potential to demonstrate to the general public that mentally ill people can see the world through some of the same lenses...and some very different.

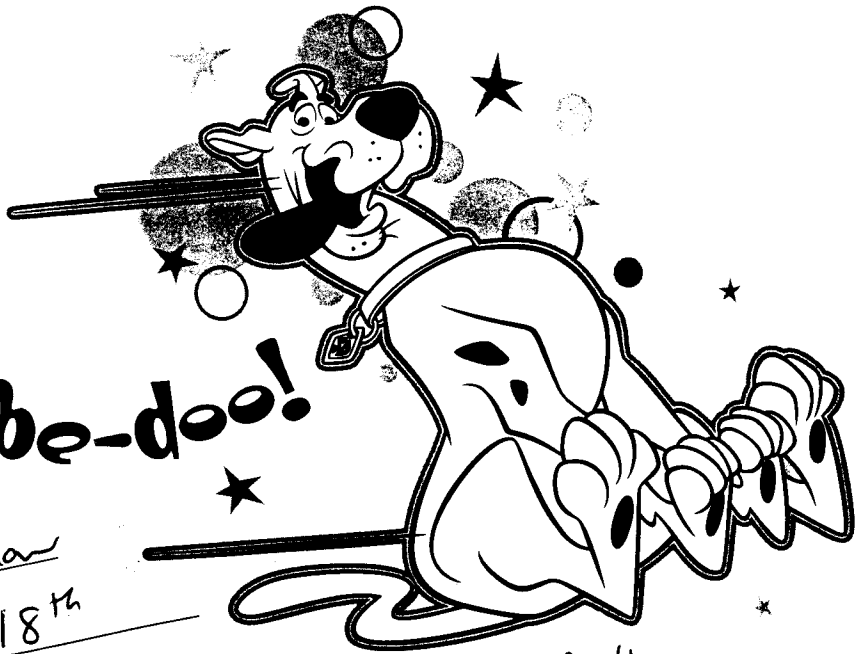
Should staff work be included?

Not sure. I will say that I am not proposing the show with the hidden agenda of putting on my own solo show! It might be interesting if visitors to the show did not know for sure whether some work is staff or consumer created. If staff work were included, it would be labeled on a first name or initial basis, just as consumer work would be labeled.

An Invitation



For
you-be-doo-be-doo!



Pop RACSB Art Show

Date Wed. May 18th

Time 4-7 PM

Place Dupont Gallery
UMW Campus



Timeline of How Far We've Come

- **August 2004** Idea introduced to Crystal Wright, John Butler, and Jim Gillespie. Began correspondence with UMW art faculty and UMW Gallery Director, Tom Somma.
- **September 2004** Proposal sent to Tom Somma requesting use of the Dupont Gallery. I briefly introduced the idea of the art show at a WIT meeting and compiled a list of likely entrants.
- **December 2004** UMW exhibitions subcommittee convened and approved proposal. I began meeting individually with potential artist contributors and supplied some with out-of-pocket supplies.
- **January 2005** Tom Somma offered to assist with exhibition announcements. Also offered 30+ spare frames for temporary use. KC staff began advertising and a preliminary submission deadline was set for February 25th. I sent a letter to Outback Steakhouse requesting catering assistance (I was advised by former Outback employees to send this letter off in January). John Butler approached the owner of Art & Frame for assistance in matting and framing submitted artwork. A summary of the art show submitted to CSS for discussion. I contacted Todd Ellis, substance abuse CM, about getting submissions from co-occurrence consumers.
- **February** Submissions being accepted. A former KC member sent in a submission as well as a \$250 donation towards the show.

Condensed Timeline of What Needs to Happen

- **February 8th** Art exhibit needs to be formally approved as an RACSB function.
- **February 25th** Preliminary deadline for consumer submissions. This date was set to get a more accurate idea of the quantity and quality of artwork we have for the gallery space. This will help guide whether more advertising is needed to get work submitted and if we should elicit staff submissions as well. Starting in February, KC staff and I can begin transporting interested consumers (esp. those who have submitted work) to the Dupont Gallery to familiarize them with the gallery setting.
- **March** Contact *The Free Lance Star*, *Richmond Times Dispatch*, and *The Washington Post*. Announcement in RACSB bulletin. John Butler made the suggestion of asking for staff commitments to attend the show opening prior to formal invitations being sent).
- **March 25th** Final deadline for submissions (if needed)
- **Early April** Turn in artwork to Art & Frame? to be matted and framed. Send out formal invitations to consumers, RACSB staff, UMW faculty/administration, local clubhouses et.al.
- **May 11th** Begin installing the show.
- **May 18th** Opening Night! 4-7PM

Commonly Asked Questions

How long will the show run?

Tom Somma suggested extending the show into the first weekend of June, UMW alumni weekend. The Dupont Gallery usually closes at the end of the Spring Semester only to be used again the following Fall. The shows are monitored by student volunteers. Since students will be home on Summer break, we will need to furnish our own volunteers (perhaps reliable KC members) to monitor the gallery when it is open to the public. Fortunately, we can determine what the gallery hours will be for the duration of the show. The Ridderhoff-Martin Gallery is open through the summer MWF from 10-4 and Sat/Sun 1-4. We could have the Dupont Gallery open MWF i.e. for a window of time within the 10-4 1-4 window.

Why is the show only centering on the artwork of the mentally ill?

This was a tough call. 1) Because this is the first show of its kind in the Fredericksburg area (and perhaps in the state), extending the show to all RACSB programs would create a chancier undertaking. 2) I have also leaned towards MH because combining work of both MH and MR could perpetuate common misunderstandings of what mental illness is. 3) A surprisingly large number of KC members have expressed an active interest in the show.

How will work be selected?

I will jury consumer submissions. Artwork will first be considered on the condition that it is original. Guidelines for what this means have been explained by KC staff and I. If we end up requesting staff submissions, this work would be juried by either a UMW professor or Tom Somma. This way I won't make any enemies!...i.e. I won't have to break the news to Crystal Wright that her quilt submissions are not acceptable ☺

How can non-artist types contribute?

- The Kenmore Club already does a good job in organizing efforts from different skill and interest levels to accomplish tasks. In order for this show to be a success, consumers will have guided ownership over publicity (flier creation and distribution etc.), creating a theme for the show, and mailing invitations to members and local clubhouses etc.
- For those with little to no artistic inclinations, I have brainstormed the possibilities of having one section of a gallery wall devoted to self-portrait sketches.
- I also envision having 1-2 sizable canvases with a commonly identified work of art in the center. Interested consumers can then be asked to write a response to the work, directly on the canvas...what they see in the painting, drawing, photograph etc. I think this has the potential to demonstrate to the general public that mentally ill people can see the world through some of the same lenses...and some very different.

Any other questions??