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# THE DENVER POST

## Littleton educational institutions work together to offer art with feeling ACC, Colorado Center for the Blind create “Shared Visions” tactile art show

By Joe Rubino, November 15, 2016

On one of the pedestals inside Arapahoe Community College’s Colorado Gallery for the Arts sit two beautiful ceramic bowls, one glazed in blue and the other green.

The artist who made the small vessels wouldn’t know their color, only how they feel in her hands.

Susie Hammond is a student at the Colorado Center for the Blind. She was also among the contributors to the ACC’s third annual “Shared Visions” multi-sensory and tactile art exhibition on display in the gallery.

Hammond, a Colorado Springs resident, was born blind. She took a ceramics class in high school, and according to ACC faculty members she worked with, really took to creating pieces on the pottery wheel for “Shared Visions.”

“It was pretty fun,” the 18-year-old said.

Hammond and dozens of other students and alumni from the Littleton-based center were on hand for the exhibition’s opening last week. The show is free to the public. It is open on the ACC campus through Friday afternoon before moving to a gallery at the National Center of Atmospheric Research in Boulder for a few weeks.



Eye masks are available so all attendees can experience the exhibition without sight.

Quinn Mahoney, 5, leads his dad, Dan Mahoney, around the “Shared Visions” exhibit at Colorado Gallery for the Arts in Littleton, Colorado on November 10, 2016. Students from ACC and the Colorado Center for the Blind collaborated on the exhibit

An estimated 40 touchable pieces, mostly produced by ACC students in entry-level art classes, make up this year’s show, according to Nathan Abels, an ACC drawing and painting faculty member and the show’s co-organizer. The first “Shared Visions” exhibition was held in a small student gallery in 2014 and exclusively featured tactile (or textured) paintings. Last year, ceramics joined the fold and the show expanded into the Colorado Gallery for the Arts. This is the first year students from the Colorado Center for the Blind contributed ceramics pieces of their own, Abels said.

“It’s become a lot more of conversation between mediums and our institutions,” Abels said.

Abels partnered with Colorado Center for the Blind art teacher Ann Cunningham to put together “Shared Visions.” A tactile artist herself, Cunningham developed a raised-line drawing board that allows her students to feel what they are drawing as they draw it. She said the ability to create images like that helps students improve spatial imagining in their minds, a skill that improves mental mapping of spaces.

“It’s just fun for people to see the possibilities that are out there,” she said of multi-sensory art. “And it’s cool for (our students) to experience an art show.”

John Ferry, an alumnus of the Colorado Center for the Blind, said he attended the exhibition at the invitation of a friend who is an ACC art student.

“One aspect of this I really enjoy is that you have the artists in the room to tell you what their piece is about and what inspired them,” Ferry said. “With all art, I like to hear what it’s about.”

Many of the pieces this year were inspired by haikus Abels distributed to his ACC pupils. The students then made two-dimensional drawings that were given depth by being punched out of heavy mat board. Ceramics students later used the mat board drawings to inspire companion pieces of their own.

“It definitely gives you a different experience,” said Alexander Hollandsworth, one of Abels’ students who created a mat board piece in the shape of a hawk. “You can feel the movement. I think it makes it more realistic.”

Hammond said her favorite piece was a portrait titled “The White Buffalo Woman.” Inspired by an American Indian legend, it depicts a woman with a three-dimensional face and hands and long, flowing black hair holding a long pipe. Hammond said it was the hair that won her over.

“We don’t get this opportunity all the time,” she said of touching art. “I think it’s pretty important.”

### **Want to experience the show?**

What: “Shared Visions” tactile art exhibition.

Where: The Colorado Gallery of the Arts, Arapahoe Community College annex building, 5900 S. Santa Fe Drive, Littleton.

When: Open today and Friday, noon to 5 p.m.

Cost: Free.