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Carpenter, 97-Year-Old Celebrate First Art Show

BY **Allan Appel** | MAY 26, 2015 2:18 PM

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ALLAN APPEL PHOTO

A carpenter who returned to his drawing pencils after more than 40 years at the urging of his wife. A woman who cut painting classes in high school, convinced she was awful, is now flourishing and wouldn't miss a painting class for the world. A woman who picked up her first brush at age 90 has four works in her first group show, at age 97.



Those were some of the stories behind the art works that emerged as [Agency on Aging of South Central Connecticut](#) (AASCC) mounted its third annual art exhibition.

The show — alive with many compositions in oil and watercolor and pencil drawing of flowers, birds, animals, and rustic landscapes — featured 57 artists from 16 area towns. They ranged in age from 60 to 102 and contributed 119 works, reported Jane Wisalowski, the group's director of business development.



Many of the works, like North Havener Christine Voight's "Greek Hillside" (pictured), emerged from weekly art classes conducted at senior centers throughout the region.

The reception, which was timed to coincide with marking Older Americans Month, drew 150 friends and admirers of the artists to the AASCC's second floor gallery and office space at 1 Long Wharf Drive. All the works are for sale, with 90 percent of the revenue going directly to the artist and 10 percent to the agency, said Wisalowski.



Westville artist Joanne Paone-Gill (pictured) is actually a professional portraitist and stained glass artist who ran an art school in Hamden in the 1970s and 1980s. As a prof she's atypical for the contributors, mainly seniors who pick up pencil or brush because, as many said, they now finally have more time.

Still, what Paone-Gill and lifelong Bridgeport carpenter Ted Yatsinko (pictured at the top of the story with his pencil drawing of a sailing ship) have in common is the pleasure of engagement and concentration that come from the endeavor.

Because so many of her projects, like stained glass work, are painstaking and time-consuming, Paone-Gill said she particularly enjoys the "immediate gratification" of putting brush to canvas. "It's a sense of accomplishment, it's freeing," she said.

"I started as a kid," said Yatsinko, who then described how he and a classmate used to do all the decorations for school events.

Then time intervened, as did a life of army, family, and working with wood. "The art went away," he said, until in retirement his wife urged him to take up his drawing pencils again.



The result drew the admiration of many, including Voight, who was struck by Yatsinko's highly detailed pencil work in "Bluebird on My Stump" (pictured between them).

"I've got some pencils at home," said Voight.

"Start movin' 'em. Focus on the detail," advised Yatsinko.



One of the most senior seniors on hand was a newcomer. At 89, Irene Potocki (pictured with her daughter) moved into [Tower One](#) in downtown New Haven and immediately took an interest in the art class offered weekly there.

“I just enjoy it. I never miss a class,” Potocki said, expressing pleasure and modesty about the four compositions she produced, all of flowers.

Her daughter Bernadette DiGiulian said her mom had always had an aesthetic sense. “She managed a large beauty salon” for decades in Utica, N.Y. before moving to New Haven, she said.

Her daughter pressed Potocki for other reasons she has become such a devotee of the art class. “It’s peaceful,” her mother answered.

A grandchild or two arrived, and the family said they were going to all go out and celebrate, toasting the 97-year-old artist on her first appearance in a group show.

The exhibition is up at the [Agency on Aging of South Central Connecticut](#), 1 Long Wharf Drive, through June 19, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

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