

# 'Artism: The Art of Autism'

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As a young boy, Andrew Mendoza loved to draw Dennis the Menace. As a teenager, he painted the hospital from the TV soap "General Hospital," as well as other acrylics.

The 27-year-old Santa Maria man has been diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome, an autism spectrum disorder, but it hasn't stopped his creativity. He is among the artists featured in "Artism: The Art of Autism: Shattering Myths about People Living on the Spectrum" (Autism Today, \$34.95).

Though people with the condition often have trouble expressing themselves, Debra Hosseini, author of the new book, says art often allows them to do it. She will sign copies 1 to 3 p.m. May 7 at Curious Cup, 929 Linden Ave., in Carpinteria, and is presenting an art show featuring the works of autistic artists May 6-26 at the



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Andrew Mendoza, 27, of Santa Maria, who has Asperger's syndrome (part of the autism spectrum disorders), painted his acrylic of "General Hospital" (2005), which appears in "Artism: The Art of Autism."

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bookstore/coffee shop. The book was released April 8.

The 54 artists' works vary from impressionistic to abstract, said Ms. Hosseini. Since moving to Carpinteria in 1996 from Bakersfield, Ms. Hosseini, 53, has curated art shows involving those with disabilities in Carpinteria, Santa Barbara and Hollywood.

Ms. Hosseini is also overseeing the art show portion of the Art of Autism Tour in which pieces will be displayed in cities near the artists' homes in the U.S. and Canada.

"Artism: The Art of Autism" is the second in a series of books showcasing art created by those with autism, including Ms. Hosseini's son, Kevin, 16, whose self-portrait is in the work.

The third Santa Barbara County artist in the book is Noah Erenberg, an Isla Vista resident whose "So Tropical," a 12½-inch-by-16½-inch oil on canvas, features a collection of deep colors and shapes open to interpretation.

Kevin, Mr. Erenberg, 41, and Mr. Mendoza talk about their contributions in "Artism," which includes profiles of the artists from across the U.S.

Ms. Hosseini said she found the contributors by putting the word out through newspapers and the Internet. She and Karen Simmons, CEO of Autism Today, picked art they believed would reproduce well in a book.

The cover of a mirror being shattered is by autistic artist Kimberly Gerry-Tucker of Seymour, Conn.

"It shatters myths about people on the (autism) spectrum," Ms. Hosseini said on a recent day at the McBean Library at Cate School in Carpinteria, where works by Kevin and other artists in the book are displayed.

"One of the myths is they don't have emotions," Ms. Hosseini said as she sat a few feet from paintings full of bright colors. "People with autism are seen as having no imagination."

Ms. Hosseini called the artists in the book not only imaginative but very much individuals in their creations. The art "shows each person is unique . . . Some of the work is very emotional."

"I like to showcase people as individuals because people with autism tend to be labeled and put together in a box," Ms. Hosseini said about her motivation to do the book.

She said the participants, who vary from children to a 64-year-old, believe autism has limited them socially. "But (art) gives them a way to express things they couldn't express."



CARMEN SMYTH / NEWS-PRESS PHOTO

Debra Hosseini, the Carpinteria author of "Artism: The Art of Autism," included son Kevin's painting, at left, in her book. Ms. Hosseini is standing in front of a display of art by contributors to "Artism" at McBean Library at Cate School in Carpinteria. Below, Noah Erenberg, 41, of Isla Vista, who has autism, shows his love for abstract imagery in his "So Tropical" (2006), an oil.



COURTESY ILLUSTRATION

"It allows their creativity to flow, and they gain recognition and have a sense of self-esteem when told they did well," Ms. Hosseini said.

Autism is a developmental disorder that impairs social interaction, communication and speech.

The artists integrate their condition into their works, Ms. Hosseini said. "It's a different way of looking at the world. There's a lot of uniqueness in their sense of color and texture."

"One of my goals is to bring out the uniqueness of each person," she said.

The pages reveal Kevin's 2004 self-portrait, a 24-inch-by-16-inch oil on canvas, as well as his 2004 "Gauguin & Me," an oil on canvas in which he imagines himself with famed French artist Paul Gauguin. Three of his other oils are featured: clouds above a hill in "Windy, Windy Day" (2006, 18-by-20 inches), "Starfish" (2009, 24-

by-12 inches) and "Ocean" (2009, 44½-by-46½ inches).

Kevin was 9 when Colin Zimbleman, his clinician at UCSB Koegel Autism Center, introduced him to painting in 2003. Kevin progressed from watercolors to acrylics to oils. His paintings have hung in government and nonprofit offices in Santa Barbara.

His mother credited her son's art for giving him a road to expression and helping him.

"He had a really hard time," she said, but noted that through the ups and downs, Kevin, who's attending Paso Robles High School, always had his art.

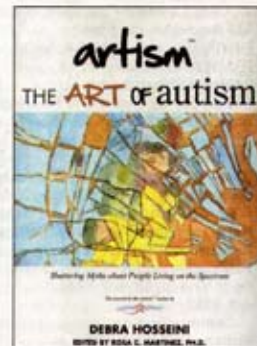
Artists influencing her son have included Vincent van Gogh, Georgia O'Keeffe and Paul Gauguin.

Ms. Hosseini described his works as impressionistic. "Now he's doing

## FYI

Debra Hosseini will sign her book, "Artism: The Art of Autism: Shattering Myths about People Living on the Spectrum" (Autism Today, \$34.95), 1 to 3 p.m. May 7 at the Curious Cup, 929 Linden Ave., in Carpinteria. Her book also is at amazon.com and, soon, Chaucer's Books, 3321 State St.

Ms. Hosseini is presenting a show of art by people with autism May 6-26 at Curious Cup, a bookstore and coffee shop.



"Artism: The Art of Autism" features everything from abstracts to photorealistic images.

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One of Mr. Erenberg's paintings in the book, "Beer Beach Bra," (2007) combines words and pictures. Words such as beer, bra, beach, flowers and IV (for Isla Vista) appear over deep purple, red and other vivid colors in the 12½-inch-by-16½-inch acrylic.

Like other artists in the book, Mr. Erenberg likes bright colors and textures, Ms. Hosseini said.

His fondness for abstract imagery is seen in his "So Tropical" (2006) and "Jungle Man" (2003), a 28-inch-by-14-inch acrylic.

"I like abstract paintings because I like bright colors and crazy shapes," Mr. Erenberg said in "Artism."

For the last 10 years, he has displayed his art throughout North America, and it's has been featured in many periodicals and newspapers, including The New York Times.

"His mom told me he doesn't want to be seen as special. He wants to be seen as a person. A lot of people want to be seen as people, not people with autism," Ms. Hosseini said.

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