

CLEVELAND
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ARCHIVES

Autistic artist communicates on canvas

BY: ARLENE FINE Senior Staff Reporter

Walk through Debra Chwast's front door, and you're not sure if you have entered a large residence or a three-story art gallery.



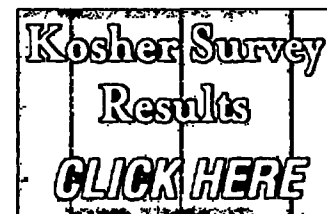
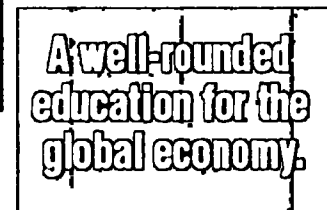
Seth Chwast spends up to ten hours a day creating his oil paintings.

Every available space in her vintage Cleveland Heights Tudor, including the bathroom walls, is filled with her son Seth's paintings.

For ten hours a day, Seth, 25, with one of his art coaches at his side, creates extraordinary artwork. Using thick, lustrous layers of oil and acrylic paint on canvases, sometimes as large as 6' x 7', he paints tropical animals and fish; large red, blue, yellow and orange horses; griffins in mysterious forests; compelling self-portraits; and multiple patterns using bold, radiant swirls of color.

His work and life story have been featured on The Today Show twice, and he has had one-man shows in galleries around the world. Locally, his paintings can be found at University Hospitals, The Cleveland Clinic, and many private collections.

Yet Chwast is unable to cross the street



Candlelighting Times

NEWS UPDATE
[click headline]

The Obama campaign returned \$36,330,000 to Palestinians in the Gaza Strip who purchased a large quantity of campaign T-shirts.

The family of the policeman killed by Semir Kuntaris angry but not surprised that

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Al Franken has taken the lead over

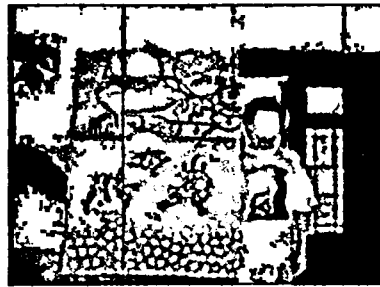


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unassisted, cannot live alone, and is incapable of engaging in normal conversation.

"My son, with a nonverbal 148 IQ, was diagnosed as autistic when he was a young child," says his mother.

"My mission since his diagnosis was to unlock the mystery of his universe so as to access his intelligence. I was told by a vocational counselor that the best Seth could do with the rest of his life was dry mop floors. I refused to accept that life sentence for Seth."



Chwast's work will be featured in October in a solo exhibit at The National Gallery of the Cayman Islands.

To discover his innate talents, Chwast took Seth to ice skating, ballroom dancing and horseback riding lessons. She involved him in baking, cake decorating and gift-wrapping classes. Five years ago, Chwast enrolled the Bellefaire/JCB Monarch School graduate in a beginning oil painting class at The Cleveland Museum of Art and a one-time drawing class.

"That was the light at the end of the tunnel," reflects Chwast. "Since art is nonverbal, Seth intuitively used his paintbrush, rather than words, to describe his world. He had the ability to mix colors and create amazing works of joyful art that reflect his vision of the world and the world around him."

The artist is prolific, and his paintings currently sell for a few hundred dollars to \$6,000 each.

For the past three years, Seth has been the featured artist at Cleveland's Ingenuity Fest. "Without question Seth's paintings belong in any contemporary gallery or museum in the

United States,” says James Levin, Ingenuity Fest executive director. “He has an amazing eye and aptitude to recreate in magical ways the images that perhaps only he sees. An invigorating joy reverberates in his work. He has an amazing gift and an equally amazing story.”

Being an “art mom” is a full-time job for Chwast. Many times a year, she and Seth fly to New York for a week at a time, so Seth can paint cityscapes and mobiles with hip, edgy artist Kip Frace. They have traveled to the Cayman and Galapagos Islands, where Seth is inspired by the tropical flora and fauna.

A solo exhibition of Seth’s paintings is scheduled at The National Gallery of the Cayman Islands from Oct. 23, 2008-March 1, 2009. Also, in celebration of Darwin’s 200th anniversary, Seth’s works will be exhibited at the Charles Darwin Foundation in Galapagos, Ecuador, and The Cleveland Museum of Art.

“I’m hoping Seth will serve as a beacon of hope to other parents with autistic children,” says Chwast. “I’m also hoping one day he will be recognized as a brilliant artist, who just happens to be autistic.”

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Anne wrote on Sep 27, 2008 5:53 PM:

" This is a beautiful story, as one never knows what can be trapped until released in the Autistic person's brain. I have high hopes for my brilliant son age 10, as well. It might be