

**“A” IS FOR ART, NOT AGE:
THE HAMMOND PUBLIC LIBRARY’S
ANNUAL SENIOR ART EXHIBIT**

by Susan Herrick Swisher



The Hammond Public Library, like many libraries, showcases the works of local artists throughout the year. For the past sixteen years, however, the work of a special group of artists has been featured each fall during the library’s annual Senior Art Exhibit.

Scott Kingery, the library’s display artist, is curator of the Senior Art Exhibit. He recalls that the idea fomented during a 1989 conversation with Arthur Meyers, then the library’s director. “Arthur Meyers suggested having senior artists show their work,” says Kingery. “I don’t know if he envisioned a juried show.”

The present library director, Margaret Evans, was Head of Technical Services at that time. “Paintings were hung on the second floor, and we’d have a punch and cookie reception out on the balcony,” Evans recalls of the early shows. “The range of media and the number of entries has really grown.”

The event runs during September and October. In 2000 and 2001, the Hammond Public Library partnered with the Northern Indiana Art Association to exhibit works at both the Main Library and NIAA’s Hammond location, Substation No. 9. There was no exhibit in 2002 due to funding cuts experienced by NIAA, and because of the Main Library’s two-year renovation. The exhibit resumed in 2003.

In 2005, the exhibit was renamed the Annual Senior Art Exhibit, dropping the word “citizen.” The last three years have seen the Friends of the Hammond Public Library providing funds for prizes and an awards reception. Kingery says this period has also seen the most growth in terms of new participants.

“Over the years, a mailing list that began with perhaps thirty to forty names has grown to nearly one hundred. Eight new names were added to the mailing list last year,” he said, noting that a wider variety of subject matter, and range of media, reflects this new vitality. Artist, Betty Delinck, of Whiting, Ind., agrees, “There are a lot of good older artists out there. It’s competitive, and it’s been growing.” Ann Noldin of Schererville, Ind., says, “The quality has increased. There’s a lot of competition.” Her husband, Ray, is also

an artist. “We’ve entered almost since the beginning. It’s my favorite contest,” she adds.

Artists live in Lake or Porter counties in Indiana, or just over the state line in Illinois. Some seniors became artists early on, while others didn’t take up art until they retired. Some are talented hobbyists, while for others, art is their trade.

Herbert Goodwin of Gary was a commercial artist in Chicago for 40 years, and began painting in oils following his retirement. He praises the renovated library as a venue, and lauds Scott Kingery as curator. “I like Scott,” Goodwin says. “He handles the show very well. It’s a pleasant show to enter.”

Kingery sends notices of the exhibit to previous entrants, as well as to local art organizations and to the press. The notice announces the rules, deadlines for submitting work, and dates of the opening reception and exhibit. As artists deliver their works, they complete an entry slip listing their name, title of the work, and medium. Kingery tapes the slip to the back or bottom of each piece submitted.

In the meantime, he’s asked a professional artist to volunteer his or her time to judge the entries, decide which pieces will make the show, and select the winners. Before the judge arrives, Kingery arranges the accumulated pieces against the walls outside his office in a colorful, eclectic ribbon. He mentally judges the works, just to see how closely his choices will compare to those of the judge. The judge arrives, examines the pieces, makes selections for the show, and decides on the winners. Kingery separates pieces selected for the show, and returns those not selected to a storage area. All artists receive a letter noting only whether their work has been selected for the exhibit. Those whose pieces are not selected are given a time frame in which to retrieve their work.

To help ensure impartiality, judges come from various art backgrounds and work in various media. A different judge is chosen each year, and participants aren’t told who it will be. Although the entry slips are taped to the reverse of the piece, sometimes judges will recognize a fellow artist’s style or subject matter.

Kingery does not release the winners' names until the opening reception, at which time the exhibit opens for viewing. Ribbons and monetary awards are presented for first through third place, in addition to three honorable mentions. "I enjoy the reception," says Betty Delinck. "It's a chance to get together with old friends and meet fellow artists." Delinck, Noldin and Goodwin all echo another reason they enjoy the Senior Art Exhibit: there is no charge for artists to enter. "It can get pricey for seniors," Noldin says of entering shows where a fee is charged for each work entered.

The exhibit's growth in both quality and quantity may be due, in part, to rule changes through the years. These changes are either suggested by the judges, or

implemented by Kingery as the need arises. Presently, the rules state that artists must be age 55 and above, and may submit up to two pieces of work in any medium. Three-dimensional work must be framed and wired for hanging, and sawtooth hangers are not accepted. Two-dimensional work must not measure more than 16 inches in any direction. Artists must have completed the work within the past three years.

Whether the works are two- or three-dimensional; whether watercolor, oil, charcoal or mixed media; whether still life, portrait, or carving, the works always draw attention from artists, library staff, and visitors. At the Hammond Public Library, "A" stands for ART, not for AGE.