

The Awakenings Project

“Awakening the Spirit Within”

Group Showing at St. Mark’s Episcopal Church

The Awakenings Project’s mission is to foster, advance and benefit the creative efforts of artists with mental illnesses. We work to raise public awareness, acceptance and appreciation of art created by people in recovery, in all creative endeavors but especially fine arts, music, literature and drama.

People familiar with mental illnesses understand the loss of purpose and self-esteem which accompany these conditions. The arts serve to heal some of these wounds, providing people with hope, purpose, and a sense of identity.

A little more information about the artists participating in this show:

Michael Allen Back in the mid-70s, I lost much of my eyesight, I was about 26 at the time. My interest in photography was dashed! Fast forward 30 years, I picked up my first digital camera and lo and behold, I was able to take a photo. Granted, I have to take a lot of photos before I get a good one. This photo of the orange man took three days. I didn’t count the number of photos but when I first started the project, it was a fresh beautiful orange. By the time I got the photo I wanted, the orange was looking a little old and crusty, which I thought very apropos.

William Alexander (1941 – 2008) He was a founding member on the planning committee of the first Awakenings Art Show in spring of 1997, for which planning began in fall of 1996. He said, “Being a part of this group allows me to help encourage young artists to not be afraid to honestly express themselves.”

Peter Austin became fascinated with art under the tutelage of a 7th grade art teacher. In the following years, his art classes became a road to self-discovery. During his college career, he explored many different mediums, from printmaking to drawing, from woodworking to sculpture. In the ensuing years, Peter sees art as an outlet for expression and experimentation.

Ryan Chacey graduated from Taylor University in Fort Wayne, Indiana with a bachelor's degree in psychology in 1999, later earning a Masters Degree in Social Work from Aurora University in 2013. As a visual artist, Mr. Chacey says he has found community, structure, and inspiration at The Awakenings Project. His art focuses on the abstract, found art and assemblages, and he's also a Polaroid photographer.

Lou Chang found out about the Awakenings Studio from his therapist. He was very excited about working with other artists who were also living with mental health issues. He came back often and was quite prolific when he was here, but he moved away, and unfortunately we have no way to contact him.

Edward “Robin” Coronel was born in the Philippines and moved to the United States at age two. He grew up in a multi-generational home. He is a self-taught artist and has shown artwork in several group shows around the world.

Trish Evers (1949 – 2000) Patricia "Trish" Evers was a teacher, an award-winning artist, and a co-founder of the Awakenings Project. Her generosity to the Awakenings Project was substantial, as she had much more art and exhibition experience than the rest of us. She donated us her studio in 1999, and she died in June, 2000 of cancer.

Noelle Hoppe has always loved singing and drawing. She often brings her ukulele and her chihuahua to the Awakenings studio. Everyone loves Chico and we love to sing along with Noelle. She also loves to include scripture, such as psalms in her artwork, and she collaborated with Julie Hough on “Anchored.”

Julie Hough has brought her dedication and enthusiasm to the Awakenings Project. In our 15 years at the Elgin studio, she has been a regular attendee, arriving every week and at times opening and staffing the studio. In her time working at the studio, she has found inspiration and companionship. She says, “I love to work and be with other artists. It’s very uplifting, and I believe art is a stigma-busting activity.”

Mark Hull majored in art in college including time spent in Scotland and Russia. His favorite medium is gouache (watercolors that can be painted over oils). Mark says he seeks God's inspiration in his work.

Robert Lundin has led the Awakenings Project since its inception in 1996. He became enamored with photography as a high school student in the 1970s, bought his first SLR camera at 16, then became the photography editor for his high school's award-winning yearbooks. His photographs have won prizes, including first place in *The Daily Herald's* regional contest. Several have graced the covers of *The Awakenings Review*.

Merle Margolis discovered the Awakenings Project through Giving DuPage. She started going to the studio in 2019. A writer and an artist, she works in various media and is inspired by creating as the Creator does. Her work, "Yellow Rose" is from her desire to show living beauty. She exhibits widely.

Sandy Mazurek: She says, "Art was like medicine to me from an early age. I received my BFA and then MFA from The School of The Art institute of Chicago. In between I was diagnosed with major depression. My life would never be the same again. Travel really influenced my work. I have also been able to give back to the community by volunteering. Awakenings has been a gift to me."

Dori Olwach believes that Art has its own language; its syllables and grammar are different for each creation. It is one of the very few things that reach across the planet yet stays the same. Dori expresses pure soul in her art. Through whatever the art form is, we are able to understand the emotions of others. The pursuit of happiness in our and in each other's lives is what provokes emotion inside my pieces.

Irene O'Neill: She said, "Ever since childhood, I wanted to be an artist. I once found an ad in the back of a magazine to 'draw Winky,' which I did, and then they sent me a bevy of exercises to do, but I have no formal training in art." When Irene met Bob Lundin in 1996, she got on board in time for the first Awakenings show.

John Rakow: He wrote, "My art and writing are about the frequent awkward experiences of navigating through life and dealing with our world. My art is often about building and breaking relationships as we go. The visual art I create illustrates the road I have travelled including my shortcuts at times. My hope is that all my work conveys the tenderness that is alive in each of us somewhere."

Mandy Rakow is multi-talented and is immersed in the arts including being a visual artist, a cellist, and a singer/songwriter. She works at the McAninch Arts Center at the College of DuPage and is the founder of Rakow Arts.

Linda Stepanek is a very prolific painter. She has been painting for many years and was in the very first Awakenings Art Show at the 1997 NAMI-IL Conference. We are so pleased that she has continued to send us new work even after moving to New Mexico to be closer to her sister, who is very supportive.

Kurt Taecker (1953 – 2010) Kurt was a very prolific impasto oil painter, having worked at it for over 30 years. His "Celebration," painting was made into a poster for the 2004 Celebration Recovery, and the original was purchased by AstraZeneca and is hanging in their main office in Schaumburg, Illinois.

Gerard Uribe (1965 – 2023) He loved creating art and eventually became a full-time artist, showing his work and commissioned paintings throughout Chicagoland. He joined forces with Awakenings in 2008, when the studio moved to Elgin. He was very prolific and loved trying new styles and techniques.

Rachelle Viray: We happened to meet Rachelle at a difficult time in her life, yet she managed to make some amazing Origami pieces. That was her true passion. The piece in this show, "Free Bird," was a collage which allowed her to shine. She also walked a 5K "Human Race" with several of us.

Anton Witek writes, "The work I do is mainly collage, off the wall, and relief sculpture. I mainly use found objects, circuit boards, resistors, computer chips, buttons, beads, and bottle caps - things that are disposed of in everyday life. In the middle of the piece, I try to convey a story, a little bit of a history, a lesson in some."