

THE INSIDERS

In November 2006, I began a nine-month residency with the Saskatoon Health Region through the *Artist in the Community* program, a project of the City of Saskatoon and the Saskatchewan Arts Board. As Artist-in-Residence, I was given the opportunity to work with people with limited mobility and/or cognitive disorders at the Sherbrooke Community Centre, a long-term care facility in Saskatoon. I implemented a studio program that provided participants—residents of Sherbrooke as well as those attending its Community Day Program—with the chance to express themselves visually. The studio was to be a place of experimentation and self-expression. I was not interested in teaching art classes, but in simply facilitating the creative process through self-exploration and self-discovery.

The studio started small. In the first week, a few residents dropped in and began to paint and draw. Some were apprehensive, even sceptical. Within a month, more than a hundred residents were working in a variety of mediums and styles, filling the small space to the point of overflow. Most had never made art before. The ones that had were forced to relearn the process, as reduced and restricted mobility (paraplegia and quadriplegia) and cognitive disorders (Alzheimer's, dementia, mental illness, and acquired brain injuries) presented them with new challenges and limitations. With perseverance and dedication (and in some cases, working through physical pain), these limitations grew into strengths. Through art, the participants of the studio program have found a new voice...and this new voice has empowered them.

Twelve artists were selected from dozens of participants. Cynthia Faust, Linda Friesen, Esther Heimbecker, Marjorie David, and Margaret Vogelgesang enjoy the process of creating images. The process does more than give them pleasure—it has improved their quality of life. Jack Coggins, Larry Fitzpatrick, Ian Huck, Matthew Proctor, and Stuart Sherin have embraced a non-verbal form of communication. This new language has provided them with voices to better express themselves and their ideas. Dennis Anderson and Kathleen Robertson have taken a more critical approach, challenging and critiquing the institution, pushing their aesthetic values, and asking questions about the relevance of art.

This project has been a profound and humbling experience. In these few short months, lives have changed. Individuals who once found themselves on the margins of society have reclaimed their voices. I am thankful for the opportunity to have worked with such an inspiring and talented group of people, and for everything they have taught me. It is my goal to see an artist in every long-term care facility. This is only the beginning.

—Jeff Nachtigall, Curator