"A Clear View"—
Hands Building Community
—by Judy Gittlesohn

As I struggle with the near final stages of assembling "A Clear View", I some how find time to distract myself from purpose to write about this project. While I should be drilling holes to attach the 207 Plexiglas box frames to one another, I sit reading emails, listening to messages and typing this article. And, it is important to write. As an artist, or rather as a person, the best time to clean the refrigerator is when a deadline looms. So tomorrow as my deadline looms, I find time for writing.

But before my particular tomorrow I need to complete the drilling of about 207 x 6 or 1242 holes. And before I can drill I need to mark and before I can mark, I need to assemble and make sure all the children's names are accurately cataloged. So now is the perfect time to write. I postpone all that needs to be done and accomplish something that when it is due would be rather difficult to do. And all this is thanks to not understanding certain aspects of my computer and having the alarm go off that the Pacific Art League's newsletter is due. It goes off regularly so while I am busily postponing my work, some alarm instructed me that another very important deadline is here as well.

Tomorrow I have an installer, Ben, thank you Ben, coming with skills to help make sure A Clear View will hang.

THE PLAN
By the seat of my pants, with an abundance of enthusiasm, I wanted to create a mural of artwork by children with developmental disabilities that will withstand the environment of a center with a heated to 92 degree indoor swimming pool. Dotti Cichon came up with the idea of painting on the insides of Plexiglas frames, which
would survive in the humidity. My goal was to organize and present the many children's artwork unified together by connecting the borders with my painting. From a distance my painted borders would create an image of a wave on the transparent Plexiglas boxes. Thus the name—"A Clear View". I pitched the idea to the Pacific Art League and together we received a grant from the Community Foundation Silicon Valley—Thank you to both organizations.

THE PROCESS
I located several organizations that serve children with developmental disabilities. I scheduled times to work with the children. I ordered two hundred plus box frames, tested the paint—added paint hardener—tested the varnish and tested the concept. My helper Angel Duncan unpacked all the boxes and taped the inside of each box frame with blue painter's tape. She would later untape, rebox, label, retape unpack and catalog each frame.

At the organizations with the assistance of teachers and staff, each child painted a test on cardboard and then painted the inside of a Plexiglas box frame. Using Golden Acrylic paints with the paint hardener GAC 200 added, the panels have long lasting and brilliant colors. Upon the completion of a painting session I photographed every child holding his or her painted artwork.

I cataloged by the kids by organization, name, sex and age and labeled each frame with the person's name and later number in the mural. I kept a master list of the mural, which changed several times.

After all the children painted, I assembled the panels into a 21 across by 10 down grid. I then marked three waves on the faces of the assembled boxes with tempera paint. Then I turned the boxes over and painted the inside of the box borders to create the waves. After my painting was complete, Dotti varnished the inside of each box. We had tested this process—leaving 2 types of varnished covered painted Plexiglas frames hanging in the swim center for 3 months to find a varnish that hold.

So the paintings came back from Dotti, varnished with two labels—the artist's name and number and lots of tempera paint. I drilled almost six holes in each box. Drilling Plexiglas was hard so it was at this point I began writing.

My original plan was to hang the boxes together by stainless steel metal notebook rings. Ben Mitchell refitted my original concept and pointed me to fishing line and beads.

I then brought the boxes to the swim center where Jennifer Buenrostro and I—mostly Jennifer—cleaned the boxes and threaded them fishing line and beads. Ben heroically built the structure and in the hot and humid environ, stood 20 feet up hanging and orchestrating the installation.

And there hangs "A Clear View"—over eighteen feet wide by eight feet high.

IMPERFECTION
The waves do not look like the waves. I intended to paint the borders to create the images of waves, but the waves didn't surface. The intended waves look more like abstract humps. I sketched, I planned, I did my best.

After one of my painting students compared "A Clear View" to a painting by the amazing artist Chuck Close, I was thrilled and related this to my dear and truly supportive husband Bob, who works hard, makes money, pays bills so I can do what I want and make art. But he can't resist an opportunity so Bob says, "Yeah, but Chuck Close gets a face out of his paintings—you can't even get a wave."

After surfacing from this disappointment I told Jennifer, "Well, I'm an enthusiast, not a perfectionist". I have painted with 207 children artists and what artists they are. They are deemed special kids and they are special and dear to me. Their artwork has touched my hands so many times; first painting, then organizing, then assembling and then painting their borders and finally in the reassembling after being varnished. The children, their names, their photo, their art have seared themselves in my mind. I look forward to seeing these people in person again. They touched my hands and my heart and my efforts acted as the structure, the connective tissue that pulls and holds this artwork together. So it's almost ok that my painting of waves didn't come through. I know that the art and the humanity of the small and large painting touched me and will continue to hang, reach, and touch many people for a long time to come.

Come see the imperfect and enthusiastic "A Clear View". The Betty Wright Center in Palo Alto, where "A Clear View" hangs is an important place. The pool is warm and welcoming. It is open to the public.

The Betty Wright Swim Center @ C A R provides high quality aquatic therapy and leisure opportunities that promote health and wellness, injury prevention, and active daily living.

The Betty Wright Swim Center @ C A R is a warm-water, fully accessible aquatic therapy, fitness, and recreation facility. Adapted aquatics, swim lessons, and aquatic therapy, fitness, and relaxation classes are available to the public. We specialize in promoting health, wellness, and independence, and in serving the physically and developmentally challenged.

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