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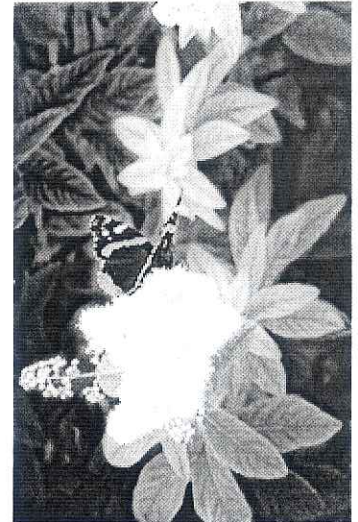
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by Jennifer Smith, Portalwisconsin.org

"Art expands your mind; it's important for everyone. As someone who has spent my entire life as an artist, it's of primary importance to me. You can't just shut it off if you have vision problems." So says Madison artist Janis Nussbaum Senungetuk, who has been making art since she was a child. She also lives with visual impairment resulting from diabetic retinopathy.

Senungetuk has worked in a range of mediums over the years and holds degrees from the San Francisco Art Institute and Northern Illinois University-De Kalb. Her current focus—and the subject of her upcoming exhibition "Bold Visions," to be held at the Wisconsin Council of the Blind and Visually Impaired in Madison—is digital photography that has been enhanced to have greater appeal and "readability" to those with visual impairments.



Senungetuk's digitally altered photograph "Red Admiral on Spirea."

"Bold Visions," which focuses on floral photography, will run Dec. 7, 2007, to Feb. 29, 2008. Visitors can view the exhibition 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday at the Council's offices at 754 Williamson Street in Madison (608-255-1166). The public is also invited to an opening reception for the exhibition Friday, Dec. 7 from 4 to 7 p.m., as part of the Council's Community Open House. Title cards and commentary about the exhibit will be available in large type and Braille.

Senungetuk's work has been supported in part by the Madison Arts Commission's Signature Grant, which is awarded to a single artist in any medium for the production of new work. "It's tremendous encouragement that your work is recognized," says Senungetuk. The grant money helps defray the cost of an artist's supplies and other expenses.



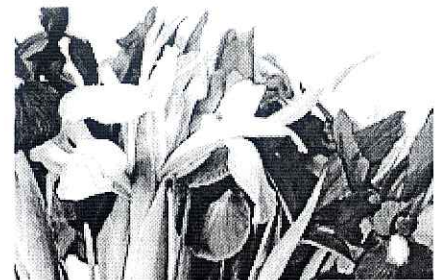
In an October 2007 conversation with Senungetuk, the artist spoke of a show she had last year at Meriter Retirement Community in Madison. While discussing her work with an activities director there, the staff member commented that Senungetuk's work would be good for someone with visual impairment, given its bright colors and strong contrast. The irony

was that the activities director didn't know that Senungetuk herself lives with visual impairment. That comment led Senungetuk to think more strongly about presenting her work to others with vision impairments—and thus the seed was planted for the show at the Council.

Senungetuk currently works in the Council's offices and expresses her appreciation for their support and encouragement of her art. "I wanted to say thank you to the Council," she notes, "and I'm trying to reach people who have been denied access [to the world of visual art]."

October is an apt time to consider the relationship between visual art and those who want to experience it but are affected by visual impairment. October is national Art Beyond Sight Awareness Month. In Senungetuk's experience, she's found that high contrast, intense color and well-defined shapes make her work more accessible to people with a range of vision impairments—and, of course, fully sighted people enjoy her work too for its vibrant natural imagery. For simulations of what people with various eye conditions might see, visit this special page on the National Eye Institute Web site.

Senungetuk doesn't want her vision impairment to define her as a person or as an artist. "It's a part of who I am, like 9,000 other things about me," she says matter-of-factly, though she acknowledges that "visual fatigue is a real issue for me." She also notes the difficulty of obtaining adequate medical care for artists and other people who are often self-employed. Senungetuk herself struggled with misdiagnosis several times when symptoms first started occurring in her graduate school days. Cataract surgery just two years ago has helped her greatly, and she looks forward to continuing her life's work as an artist.



"Iris Bouquet" by Janis Nussbaum Senungetuk.

To contact Janis Nussbaum Senungetuk, e-mail her at portrait@terracom.net or call her at 608-216-0160. You may also view her work in Portalwisconsin.org's juried online gallery of Wisconsin artists.

If you have comments or questions, please contact us at portalwisconsin@wpt.org.

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