

Savant art exhibit
to open Friday at
Windhover Center

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THE REPORTER
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Two extraordinary artists will be making their way to Fond du Lac this week to share themselves and their work with the world.

Ping Lian Yeak, 13, from Australia, and Gregory Blackstock, a retired pot washer from Seattle, Wash., who draws order out of chaos, are guests at the opening night of the international art exhibit "Windows of Genius."

Both artists have been identified as savants and are gifted with certain skills considered to be at "genius" level. The rare art exhibit brings together for the first time



Gregory Blackstock

of a dozen prodigious savants living throughout the world.

Savant syndrome is a rare condition in which persons with serious mental disabilities, including autistic disorder, have some "island of genius" that stands in marked contrast to their overall handicap.

The opening reception will be held from 6 to 8 p.m. Friday, Sept. 7, at Windhover

A look into the "Windows of Genius"

Center for the Arts, 51 Sheboygan St.

Blackstock, who is arriving in Fond du Lac on Thursday, will autograph his book titled "Blackstock's Collections," which will be available at the reception. Both artists will be demonstrating their work.

Galleries are sending savant artwork to include in the exhibit from as far away as England, said Jack Talbot, marketing program manager for the Windhover. A Korean crew will film a documentary on the event and several regional television stations will be covering opening night. Journalists from Germany are also traveling to Fond du Lac for the exhibit.

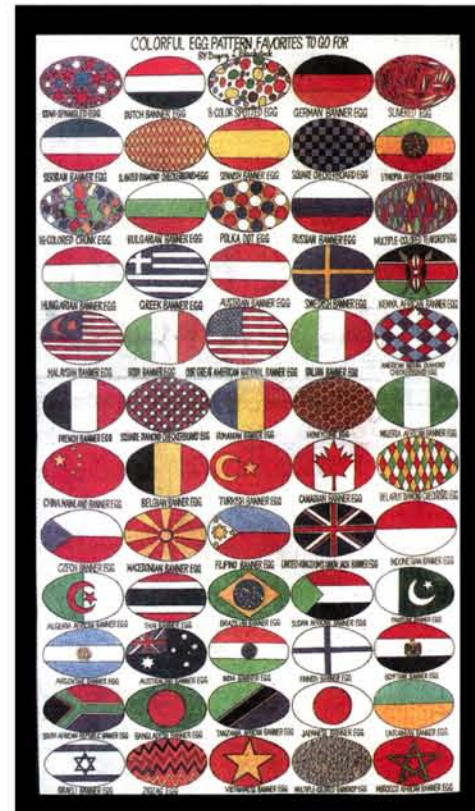
"We are expected between 350 and 500 people the first night," Talbot said.

The "meet the artist" night at the gallery includes hors d'oeuvres, compliments of Linstrom's Catering, and music by pianist Paul Thelen, who will be performing with his two daughters accompanying him on violin.

Video featured

The exhibit is set up in such a way that persons can visit anytime and watch a continuous loop video describing

the art of the savant — which they can see in the exhibit —



The Reporter photo by Justin Connaher
This page of "colorful egg pattern favorites" drawn by artistic savant Gregory Blackstock of Seattle, Wash., is taken from "Blackstock's Collections," a book published by Princeton Architectural Press. Blackstock is one of a dozen prodigious savant artists whose works will be featured in the upcoming exhibit, "Windows of Genius," at Windhover Center for the Arts. Blackstock is known for his pencil drawings of patterns, many of which are featured in his book. He will autograph the book, which will be available at the exhibit's opening reception on Friday, Sept. 7.

SAVANT ARTWORKS ON DISPLAY

■ Windhover Center for the Arts, 51 Sheboygan St.
■ Opening reception from 6 to 8 p.m. Friday, Sept. 7
■ Exhibit runs through Friday, Oct. 12
■ Gallery is open 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturdays
■ More information is available at www.savantsyndrome.com or by sending an e-mail to Jack@windhovercenter.com or daroldt@charter.net.

SAVANTS

as well as something about the world of the savant. These are five- to six-minute clips of the artist at work and the story behind them.

Most of the pieces at "Windows of Genius" come from the personal collection of Dr. Darold Treffert of St. Peter. The pieces include paintings, drawings, sculpture and other art forms.

Treffert is on the staff at Behavioral Health Department of St. Agnes Hospital in Fond du Lac and is a clinical professor in the department of psychiatry of University of Wisconsin-Madison. He is author of the book "Extraordinary People: Understanding Savant Syndrome."

Treffert said Yeak's pieces are produced with startling rapidity and quantity.

"For Ping Lian, and other autistic savants, training the talent through use of special skills works as a conduit toward normalization. It produces gains in language, socialization and daily living skills," Treffert said.

Music is the most common of the savant skills, Treffert said, but art skills, when present, can be astonishing in quantity, quality and digital camera-like fidelity.

The most well-known autistic savant artist at present is Stephen Wiltshire



Submitted photo

Savant artist Ping Lian Yeak, 13, from Australia, will be a guest at the opening night of the international art exhibit "Windows of Genius" at the Windhover Center for the Arts, 51 Sheboygan St.

whose accurate architectural drawings — window pane by window pane — drew raves from art critics who described him, as a child, as a "rocket of young talent which explodes and continues to shower us with its sparks." His work will be part of the exhibit.

After a 45-minute helicopter ride over Rome, for example, Wiltshire can then produce, over a three-day period, a drawing of that scene street-by-street, building-by-building, and column-by-column. Wiltshire now has his own gallery in London.

The streaming video at www.savantssyndrome.com of Wiltshire as he draws his human camera impressions

of Rome after a 45 minute helicopter ride over the city is particularly astounding, Treffert said, and documents the remarkable literal memory that artistic savants possess.

Expert on savants

Treffert will be speaking to students from 10 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. on Monday, Sept. 17. Teachers are encouraged to bring their classrooms to learn firsthand from Treffert, who is known as the world's leading expert on savant syndrome.

Windhover Executive Director Kevin Miller said the international exhibit puts Fond du Lac in the center of the world's view.

"What I tell people is whether or not you like art, this is great for the entire community," he said. "It ties in nicely with our recent recognition in National Geographic magazine. People are noticing us. It shows how art can have an impact on people's lives and the savants themselves."

The artists' stories highlight as well that savant abilities, whatever form they take, are not mysterious or frivolous skills, Treffert said.

"We are the beneficiaries of their incredible abilities and works, and, simultaneously, they cause us to ponder, with wonderment, about the hidden potential, perhaps, within us all," he said.

Agnesian HealthCare, the Fond du Lac Area Foundation and the Wisconsin Medical Society Foundation are sponsoring the exhibit.