

Art of disabled gains showing in a celebration of diversity

■ EXHIBIT

Continued from Page 10

At first, some professional artists were skeptical of being included in a show with such a wide range of ability on display.

"I have a lot of issues about categorizing disability-related art," said Steven R. Dolan, a Boston artist whose dramatically lit, theatrical photographs grace the wall near the auditorium. "I don't think there is a disability culture the way there is a black culture. It is not a community per se."

Dolan, who uses a wheelchair after a spinal cord injury in a diving accident 23 years ago, had been involved with Very Special Arts through its emerging artists program helping them market their work.

"I really like the idea of the multicultural aspect more than multiability," said Dolan. At times, he has faced discrimination from younger artists because of his wheelchair use.

"Being over 40 in a wheelchair doing work, sometimes younger people get intimidated," said Dolan, 41. Eventually, they get beyond the imagined limitations of the wheelchair and "see it is my work" that speaks for itself, he said.

Giovanni DeCunto, who is known professionally by his first name alone, on the other hand, embraces the "disability" label if it means he can help others.

"I see myself as a spokesperson

for people with disabilities," said the artist, who describes himself as having severe dyslexia.

"It is important for people to know you can overcome anything... and excel," he said. Giovanni's paintings are in several museum collections, including the Fogg Art Museum in Cambridge, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and the National Portrait Gallery in Washington.

"I think one of the beauties of

this show is there is no label, this [piece of art was] done by a disabled person, this is done by a disabled person," said Syma, first artist to do a residency for Very Special Arts at the Cotting School in the early 1980s. Now on a medical leave from her teaching job, she discovered the line between disability and non-disability is not static.

Blurring that distinction is one of the goals of "Art Works!"

FYI

"Art Works! a celebration of the diversity of art-making in our community" runs through Aug. 25 at the Fuller Museum of Art, 155 Oak St., Brockton. Some of the artists in the exhibit: Syma, Steven R. Dolan, Giovanni, Young Griffiti Masters, Janaya Majied, Janey, Jeffrey R. Melzack, students from Perkins School for the Blind, Kurt Reynolds. Hours: Tuesday through Sunday, noon to 6 p.m. Admission free. For more information call (608) 588-6000.

"From the Outside In work by adult artists with developmental and other disabilities" also runs through Aug. 25. The exhibit features work by Cathy Anderson,

Robert Kirshner, Joanne O'Connell, Carmella Salvucci, Roger Swike, Sanford A. Winslow and Bohill Wong. It is presented in conjunction with The Gateway Gallery and Crafts Store of Brookline and independent curator Julie Bernson.

For more information about Very Special Arts Massachusetts, call (617) 350-7713 (voice), (617) 350-6836 (TTY), or e-mail to: vsam@aol.com. The guide, "Access Expressed! Massachusetts: A Cultural Access Directory," is available on the World Wide Web at: <http://www.arts-online.com/vsam.htm>.

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