



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **SHELDON ART GALLERIES SHOWCASES THE WORK OF NEURODIVERSE ARTISTS IN NEW EXHIBITION**

ST. LOUIS - The Sheldon Art Galleries presents **Artists First: Connection, Cohesion & Changeability**, on view **June 2 – August 6, 2023** in the Nancy Spirtas Kranzberg Gallery. A free public opening will be held **Friday, June 2 from 5 - 8 p.m.** Galleries are open until 9 p.m. for First Fridays in Grand Center. **View the exhibition during summer *Golf the Galleries* hours:** Tuesday – Thursday, 12 – 5 p.m.; Friday, 12 – 8 p.m.; and Saturday and Sunday, 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. Admission is free. For more information, visit [TheSheldon.org](http://TheSheldon.org) or call 314-533-9900.



The exhibition at The Sheldon will feature 20 Artists First artists, highlighting their passion and dedication to their art. Some of the artists have been involved with Artists First for over 10 years and consider the studio their haven. Each featured artist has a unique story to tell.

Artists First is a non-profit open art studio that fosters independence through creative self-expression for adults with pervasive mental illness, developmental disabilities, and traumatic brain injury. The studio serves over 300 artists annually through a range of artistic programs that provide a creative platform for groups often confined to the fringes of society. With varying levels of supervision depending on the individual needs of the artists, Artists First staff and volunteers promote participants' self-esteem through their independent use of materials, exploration of the world of creating art and socialization with their peers.

One featured artist has both Down syndrome and autism. She has difficulty seeing, which directly correlates to the intricate mark making shown in her work. She then uses a palette knife instead of a brush to spread the paint out both vertically and horizontally. Once she has filled the canvas and the paint has dried, she goes in with a color pencil, meticulously holding each color pencil up to her face and examining it before deciding where to place it on the canvas. The colored pencil marks almost serve as stitches between the different colors of paint. The artist has grown tremendously since beginning at Artists First, both artistically and developmentally.

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***Sponsored by Christy Beckmann, Nina Needleman and Peggy W. Symes***

*The Sheldon's exhibition series is supported by The Bellwether Foundation, Arts and Education Council, Regional Arts Commission, and the Missouri Arts Council, a state agency*

*Image Caption: Julie Hart, Untitled, 2020, acrylic, color pencil, 20 x 24 inches.*