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Art in the Arbor

By Pam Spaulding, The Louisville Courier-Journal

Oakdale artist Trent Altman will be at this weekend's Art in the Arbor festival.

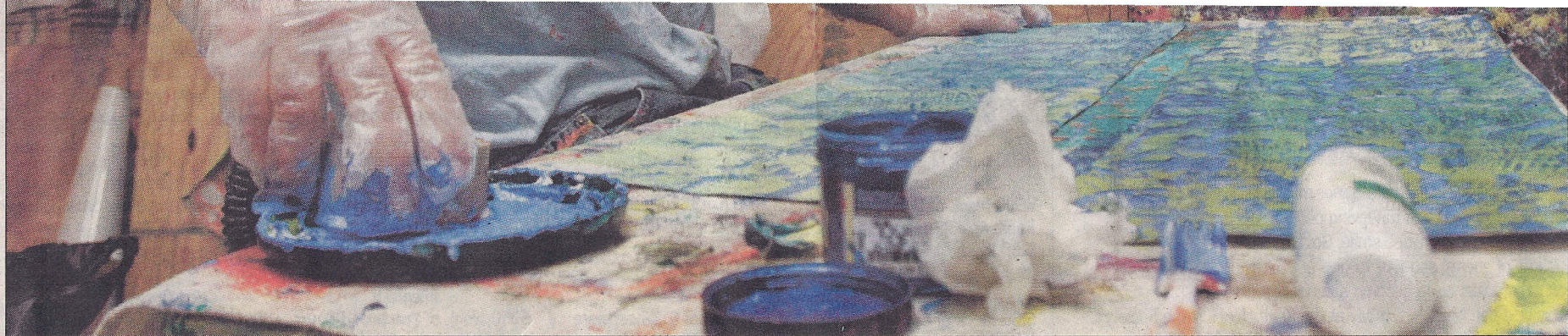
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COVER STORY



Trent Altman works in his studio at Mellwood Arts Center. His work will be featured at the Art in the Arbor Festival this weekend.

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Autistic, but so artistic

Oakdale man connects through his painting

By Charlie White
cwhite@courier-journal.com
The Courier-Journal

Trent Altman's abstract acrylic paintings and mixed media collages have been featured at the St. James

Court Art Show, the Mellwood Arts Center, where he has a studio, and the Autism One Conference in Chicago.

But it's the Art in the Arbor Festival, being held this weekend at Thomas Jefferson Unitarian Church on

Brownsboro Road, where he has returned each year since 2004 to sell his art.

For Altman, a 34-year-old Oakdale resident who is autistic, art has allowed him to connect with other people in ways that his family says he

never did before. Autism, a developmental disorder, limits his ability to speak and relate to others.

His art "gives him the freedom to express who he is," said his mother, Jackie Marquette, an autism transi-

tion specialist with a doctoral degree in educational administration from the University of Louisville.

Altman graduated from Jeffersontown High School in 1998. His venture into the art world started a few years later when Marquette began working with him to create original bookmarks for her first book, "Independence Bound: A Mother and Her Autistic Son's Journey to Adulthood."

"I thought, 'If he can do that, I wonder what else he can do?'" she said.

It was at that point, she said, that she started thinking her son's art could become a business that supplements his income.

"My goal for him has always been to have him live independently," she said.

And Altman has since become a successful artist, selling nearly 100 original works, as well as thousands of signed and numbered prints.

They range from soothing hues with titles such as "Sea of Calm" and "Silver-Lined Clouds" to explosive contours in pieces like "Shower of White Light."

"Many of his friends now are fellow artists so it's become a real social network for him," said Jason Williams, Altman's live-in assistant who also has worked part time with him since 2002 in the pet department at Meijer on Preston Highway in Okolona.

Williams worked as a home health care aide in Frankfort, Ky., for six years before moving to Louisville to work with Altman. In addition to driving Altman to work and art classes, Williams has taught him to do several chores, such as laundry and caring for his golden retriever Katie.



By Pam Spaulding, The Louisville Courier-Journal

Art teacher Lori Montgomery assists Altman as he works.



By Charlie White, The Courier-Journal

Altman is at home with mother Jackie Marquette, stepfather Ralph Marquette, and live-in assistant Jason Williams, right.

TRENT ALTMAN

► To learn more about Trent Altman's work, go to www.trentsstudio.com.

MORE PHOTOS

► An online gallery is at courier-journal.com/south.

"Trent loves the sensation of wet paint on a brush touching a canvas," Montgomery said.

Trent usually only speaks two or three words at a time so he and Montgomery often communicate through body language.

"People often ask why he needs me since he's so good," Montgomery said.

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A state grant helps pay Williams’ salary, as well as for Altman’s art instruction and the studio at Mellwood Arts Center.

Altman paints about four hours a week at the studio and also works on projects at the home of his mother and stepfather, Ralph Marquette, who live off Beulah Church Road.



By Charlie White, The Courier-Journal

Altman is at home with mother Jackie Marquette, stepfather Ralph Marquette, and live-in assistant Jason Williams, right.

The Marquettes also serve as Altman’s “roadies,” driving him to various art shows around the region.

Lori Montgomery, who has worked with Altman in the studio since 2004, described his method as “quick and fast.”

As an art facilitator, Montgomery

paint for him, makes sure he doesn’t cover up dynamic images and leads him with ideas on days when he’s having trouble focusing.

She also has to slow him down a bit at times, but other times she simply watches as Trent takes the brush and unleashes colors onto the canvas.

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“People often ask why he needs me since he’s so good,” Montgomery said. “But even the best athletes and singers have coaches.”

Last month, University of Louisville officials purchased two of Altman’s paintings that now hang inside its new Autism Center at 1405 E. Burnett Ave.

Reporter Charlie White can be reached at (502) 582-4653.