

Art with Elders: 2100 Franklin Street Tower, Oakland

By [Joshua Cohen](#), SF Art Scene Examiner

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Who'd a thunk it? Old people, people like me, can draw and paint? Well, ok, I'm not 'that' old. But didn't eighty year old Jasper Johns just win the Presidential Medal of Freedom, our nation's highest civilian honor? He's the first artist since Alexander Calder to win the award.

Eldergivers, a Bay Area organization whose intent is helping San Francisco area seniors stay connected to their communities and whose mission and motto is Connecting the Generations, sponsors a program titled Art With Elders. This program, AWE for short, offers older adults who live in San Francisco Bay Area long-term care facilities an opportunity to explore and develop hidden artistic talents.

As suggested on AWE's web site, one of the most important connections an older person can make and maintain is with the curiosity, wonder, and unselfconscious urge to explore and create.. The elderly, and for that matter all of us, want to rekindle the best characteristics of our childhood. These characteristics include the spontaneity, the excitement of grappling with the unfamiliar and the sense of unlimited potential that often characterize our younger days. Jean Dubuffet (1901-1985) said it took him a lifetime to learn how to again paint like a child.

As stated on their web site, "Art With Elders has given thousands of seniors a new lease on life by introducing them to the adventure of art."

A lot of fine work is featured on the 15 compact wire mesh display towers in the lobby of 2100 Franklin Street, Oakland. You can also enter at 2101 Webster Street. It's one big building!

As illustrated by the accompanying photos, each artist's work is displayed, beneath which is a photo of the artist and a brief note explaining the artist's credo, some with biographical information.

One such artist is 83 year old Cass Humble of Laguna Grove – AgeSong Senior Communities. She proclaims that she's "not really an artist." Writing is her thing. Cass' husband was the poet George Barker, described by T. S. Eliot as one of the best of Britain's young poets. Take a long look at her drawing "Down in My Heart."

Another piece on display is a beautiful work titled Clare Smith by Sharon Grace of the Laguna Honda Hospital and Rehabilitation Center in San Francisco.

Still another work, and one that intrigued me is The Angel of the Odd by Arthur Bell, also of the Laguna Honda Hospital and Rehabilitation Center. Arthur, who began painting when he was 14, uses his paintings to tell stories. He is a narrative painter who graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the Academy of Art in San Francisco. Despite surviving a stroke and two month coma Arthur paints 6 hours a day.

I urge you to visit 2100 Franklin Street to see this fabulous display of art by the elderly. There are many pieces on display, several on each wire mesh tower complete with a photo of the artist and a note allowing you to discover more about the artist and his or her work.

I want to thank Eldergivers Executive Director Brent H. Nettle for allowing me to photograph the exhibit and Linda of the Security Desk at Center 21 for assisting me in approaching the building's staff. I believe more Bay Area office, commercial and public buildings should allow and promote shows like that of Eldergivers Art with Elders exhibit and I applaud Center 21 for turning their lobby over to Eldergivers for this wonderful exhibit.

What:

ELDERGIVERS 19th Annual Art with Elders Exhibit

Where:



2100 Franklin Street Tower

Oakland, CA

For How Long:

Through February 25, 2011

The Lobby is Open Monday - Friday, 8am to 6pm

Center 21 is in the Lake Merritt district of downtown Oakland, Just two blocks from the 19th Street Oakland BART Station. It is near The Paramount Theater, Lake Merritt and the Cathedral of Christ the Light.

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