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'Here I Am' exhibit portrays sickness, care

BY JOHN PITCHER
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Mark Gilbert's "Here I Am And Nowhere Else: Portraits of Care" is an artistic anomaly.



Mark Gilbert's pencil sketch of poet Ted

The exhibit features 50 portraits of patients and caregivers that Gilbert created during a recent two-year artist residency at the University of Nebraska Medical Center.

In that respect, "Portraits of Care" is like any other show featuring the work of a single artist. But this exhibit, which opens with a reception Friday night at the Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts, is also a bona fide scientific study.

Dr. William Lydiatt, a head-and-neck surgeon at UNMC, and Virginia Aita, a nurse and associate professor of health studies at the school, funded Gilbert's residency as part of a medical research project.

The ongoing study looks at the potential of art to integrate with medicine, among other things. It also is trying to see whether such art could alter public perceptions about illness.

Lydiatt and Aita will attempt to measure those changes at Friday

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Kooser is featured in the exhibit.

people who come to the exhibit. Aita believes the responses likely will reveal a lot of empathy and understanding.

That's because the 39-year-old Gilbert approached his subjects with considerable sympathy. His intent, he said in an interview this week, was to capture their inner world.

So in "Jared," a charcoal sketch of a 21-year-old man who lost an arm to cancer, Gilbert portrays a patient who is thoughtful, tired, but also defiantly angry. His mother, sketched in the charcoal and paper drawing "Jodee," shows the weariness of being Jared's primary caregiver.

Jared — subjects are mostly listed by first names in the exhibit to protect privacy — died in September.

But "Portraits of Care" is not just about illness. It's about life. So the exhibit shows people at all stages of life, including birth.

"This exhibit has a universal theme," Gilbert said. "So we can all relate, because at some point in our lives, we are all going to be patients or caregivers."

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night's reception. They will distribute a survey, developed by Gallup, to

Mark Gilbert's "Here I Am and Nowhere Else: Portraits of Care" opens with an artist's reception from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. Friday at the Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts, 724 S. 12th St. The exhibit runs through Feb. 21. The gallery is open 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Tuesdays through Saturdays. Admission and parking are free. Call 341-7130. There also will be a project introduction from 7 to 10 tonight at the Joslyn Art Museum, 2200 Dodge St. Gilbert and poet Ted Kooser — one of the subjects of the exhibit — will attend.

Sunday in ETA: More about the artist.

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