



The Art within AMD

This summer, the Meyers Art Gallery at the University of Cincinnati presented a unique exhibit. ***The Persistence of Vision*** displayed 50 early and late works by artists living with macular degeneration.

The show, sponsored by the Vision and Art Project of the Massachusetts-based **American Macular Degeneration Foundation** (www.macular.org) highlights transformations in medium, style, and themes that result from vision changes in established artists.

One artist featured in the show was also the subject of a related story in the *New York Times*. Serge Hollerbach is a 94 year old artist, living in New York City, and still actively painting. More than 25 years ago, his eyesight began deteriorating and he shifted his style from realism to more abstract works. The perfectionism he sought in his early works gave way to a looser style. As he explained, “There is such a thing as a second childhood – to be playful, you have nothing to lose. Nothing to lose is a kind of new freedom.” He speaks of drawing on his ‘third eye’ when he creates, which for



him is “something that your spirit, or your mind, or your soul sees.”

Hollerbach is certainly not the first artist whose style evolved as a result of macular degeneration.



One of the 20th century's most prominent artists, Georgia O'Keeffe struggled with AMD. The shading, fine details and shadows evident in her early landscapes gave way to broader, larger,

looser and less detailed works. Her *Sky above Clouds* series, seen here, was painted when she was in her late 70s, and shows the view from an airplane window on an 8 x 24 foot canvas.

Another artist who persevered despite the AMD was Lennart Anderson who died in 2015. A teacher at Columbia, the Art Students League and Brooklyn College, Anderson brought his knowledge of the masters to contemporary street scenes, portraits and still life paintings. Asked why he was still painting despite AMD, he said that he wanted to share the things that he still saw beautifully.



A diagnosis of AMD should not be a call to put away your paints and canvases. As ***The Persistence of Vision*** exhibit shows, artistic styles can be transformed as vision changes, drawing on instinct and emotion. Even if you have never taken an art class, it is not too late to express yourself through this medium. You can find your own style: consider one that uses shapes, color and contrast rather than trying to capture realistic details. Here are a few tips that may make painting a little easier:

- Boldly label your painting supplies, and keep them in the same spots on your palette so you can avoid using or mixing the wrong color. Claude Monet complained that cataracts interfered with his ability to see color. He used a numbering system on his tubes of paint to avoid confusing them and was forced to rely on the labels rather than his own eye when selecting colors as his vision deteriorated.
- Position your easel or drawing board so that the windows or the sun is behind you to take advantage of as much natural light as possible.
- Use a flexible-arm lamp that you can direct to light up your work area. Some swing-arm lamps have built-in magnifiers to help with detail work.
- YouTube is your friend! There are countless art lessons available on the internet for you to watch and enjoy. Even if you don't feel ready to touch a canvas, you can discover how a painting comes to life, and listen to artists explain light, choice of color and intent. And with a video, you can pause and take time to examine the work closely.