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ARTS & CULTURE

Inaugural artist in Envision’s residency program features Braille exclusively in his works

BY AMY GEISZLER-JONES *EAGLE CORRESPONDENT*

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Go ahead and touch the art when you visit the new exhibition that opens Friday and runs through June 28 at Envision Arts Gallery.

And if you’re looking to meet the artist during the First Friday reception from 5 to 9 p.m., he’ll be easy to spot — he’ll be wearing an outfit featuring Braille dots.

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“I’ve been called the Braille Riddler,” said British artist Clarke Reynolds, who has been in Wichita since mid-March as the inaugural artist of the gallery’s new residency program.

Through his “American Way Words” exhibit — with artwork featuring oversized, color-coded Braille dots, Reynolds wants visitors to discover language and words through touch and sight.

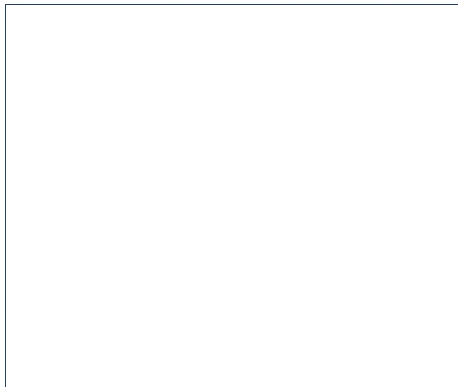
Reynolds, who lost vision in his right eye by age 6 and then started losing vision in his left eye in his 30s, features Braille exclusively in his works.

“My aim is to make Braille more inclusive in society through the size and color of the dot,” said Reynolds in a release about the exhibition.

Along with featuring a playable Scrabble board with oversized, 6-by-6-inch Braille tiles, Reynolds’ first solo show in the U.S. also allows him to have some fun with the quirks and idiosyncrasies of the English language.

Through 52 one-square-foot tiles, Reynolds has juxtaposed 26 British and American terms for the same items, such as biscuit and cookie, sweets and candy, petrol and gasoline, and ice lolly and popsicle.

“And underneath it has what I think of about the words,” he said. Like a biscuit is dunkable in a cup of tea, he explained.



“We’ve already had some giggles,” said Reynolds, during a break from installing his works with Sarah Kephart, a senior manager with Envision Arts.

After he’d lost sight in his right eye, Reynolds was determined to be an artist. He never lost that determination, even as he started losing sight in his left eye while working as a dental model maker. That’s when he turned to making art full time.

“Some people might think losing sight is the worst thing that can happen, but art saved me. Honestly, for me, blindness made me a better person,” said Reynolds, who was diagnosed with a hereditary retinal dystrophy condition in his 30s.

In his artist’s bio on his website, Reynolds describes his vision now like “looking underwater,” where he sees shadows, shapes and glimpses of color. He also describes it as “looking through a thousand dots — hence, my attraction to dots in my art, and now those dots have meaning.”

To help convey that meaning, handouts explaining Reynolds’ color-coding system for Braille dots will be available. Sighted visitors can try to translate the artwork themselves by touching it, of course, rather than just reading the signs posted alongside the works.

Proceeds from the sale of Reynolds’ pieces will help both the Envision Arts program and VICTA, a U.K. nonprofit, or charity in British terms, similar to Envision. Reynolds

is a VICTA patron.

As an advocate for inclusiveness and those with vision impairment, Reynolds was the ideal artist to kick off Envision Arts' new residency program and have as a guest artist in the gallery, Kephart said.

"As an initiative of Envision, we serve as a vital community hub to champion artistic expression that transcends physical limitations," she said.

In the past few weeks he's been in Wichita, Reynolds conducted Play Touch Make Braille workshops with Envision artists, at Heartspring and in schools.

On Saturday, April 6, he'll hold another one of his workshops at the Envision Arts Gallery from 10 a.m. to noon that will be open to the public. With limited seating, advance registration is required along with a \$10 suggested donation. The online registration link can be found through the Envision Arts Gallery Facebook page, [facebook.com/EnvisionArtsGallery](https://www.facebook.com/EnvisionArtsGallery).

'AMERICAN WAY WORDS' AT ENVISION ARTS GALLERY

What: Solo show by British Braille artist Clarke Reynolds

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Where: 801 E. Douglas Ave., Suite 806

When: First Friday opening reception 5-9 p.m. April 5, exhibit will run through June 28; gallery hours are 10 a.m.-noon and 1-5 p.m. weekdays, and 10 a.m.-2 p.m. the second Saturday of the month

Admission: Free

More info: 316-440-1699 or envisionus.com/envision-art-gallery-and-community-engagement-center

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