

Disabled man freed by art

Legally blind, wheelchair-bound, Leland Wilson considers painting his mental, physical therapy

BY MELVIN BACKMAN
The Post and Courier

Painting makes him feel free.

Confined to a wheelchair and rendered legally blind by cerebral palsy, Leland Wilson has reason to feel otherwise.

His canvases dot the walls of his studio at home.

Although he has a job at Lowes and used to play in a handicapped basketball league, painting is his favorite vocation by far.

When painting comes up in conversation, a nervous smile flashes across his face. It is clear that he takes pride in what he does.

Leland's interest in art began when he took classes in the subject at Wando High School. After he graduated, he kept developing his craft.

He says painting helps him with his thought processes and hand-eye coordination, acting as a type of therapy.

His paintings are based on photos of Lowcountry scenes such as lighthouses and marshes at sunset.

His father is Dr. Edward Wilson, director of ophthalmol-

ogy at the Medical University of South Carolina. He takes the photos for Leland, and his art teacher, Dianne Tennyson, mixes colors for him. But the paint strokes — restricted to mostly broad ones because of his condition — are all his own.

Tennyson says that her lessons with Leland are difficult for him, and that he is often tired when their time is done. Despite the strain it puts on him, he continues to put brush to canvas.

Tennyson says painting brings out the trait that stood out about him when she first met Leland at Wando: his overwhelmingly positive attitude.

"I look at him and say, 'I wish I could be as positive as him,'" she says.

The hard work he puts into being able to paint shows. He paints well and is able to accurately capture the essence of scenery in the pictures his father brings to him. Positive views of his work are not in short supply.

At last year's Piccolo Spoleto festival, Leland sold two paintings for \$200 each. Some of his works are at an exhibit at



MELVIN BACKMAN/STAFF

Leland Wilson poses with one of his works. Wilson, who is wheelchair-bound and legally blind, has paintings featured in an exhibit at the MUSC Wellness Center.

MUSC's Wellness Center. One of his paintings serves as this year's Save the Lighthouse race poster.

In the future, Leland wants to expand his subject matter to the subjects captured in photos his father took in South America. His mother knows that

whatever he does, art will be a part of it.

"He's told me before that it's the one thing that he can do really well," she says.

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