

# Restless artists on display at Western Maine Art Group

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By Nicole Carter

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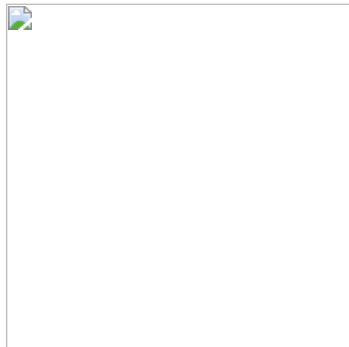
NORWAY — Peter Herley of Norway has been an exhibiting artist most of his life.

Having been raised in New Jersey and becoming a country-wide wanderer after graduating from high school, Herley's first art exhibit was produced by his fifth-grade girlfriend, in the living room of another friend.

"My girlfriend, she put up my art and invited all the kids to come," he said. "It was a cute show."

Since that first show, circa 1970, Herley has traveled across the country, pursuing his art while advocating for different social causes, including homelessness.

A resident of Norway for the past decade, Herley has continued working as a mixed media artist through affiliations with artists groups, including the Western Maine Art Group.



Twelve-year-old artist Colby Martel is showing his art at the Western Maine Art Group all through May. *Supplied photo*

attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder.

Now he has come full circle, inviting young fifth-grade artist Colby Martel to exhibit with him at WMAG for the month of May, starting this Saturday.

Whether or not Herley is passing a torch to a new generation can be debated, but the partnership he and Martel are forging is reminiscent of the journey he has been on for more than 50 years, touching artists and viewers with his art and his mission to help others.

Martel comes from a long line of artists but is mostly self-trained. WMAG was founded by his grandfather, Lajos Matolcsy, the headquarters of which bears his name. Martel's mother, [Aranka Matolcsy, is a multi-media artist](#) and has also managed several arts organizations around Oxford Hills, including WMAG.

Martel has produced an array of artistic expression throughout his 12 years, an astonishing accomplishment for anyone but especially impressive considering he has Down syndrome, autism, and

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Herley came to know Martel through a social media friendship with his mom. The two got to know each other through mutual friends and have participated in the same exhibits and events over the years.

"It was a mutual friend who suggested that Colby and I should do a show together," Herley recalled.

"Peter and Colby began experiencing each other's art through Facebook," Matolcsy said. "I would post work that Colby had done and Peter was sharing his work, too. He was really getting into the kid's creativity and all the different ways he expresses it."

"A lot of people have this," Herley said. "But Colby has a way of looking at something and gravitating toward it."

One of those things was Herley, from their first meeting at the Alan Day Community Garden in Norway, where Herley was volunteering.

"I guess it was a bad hair day," Herley said. "I was directing the parking lot. Colby was in the back of the car, wearing black sunglasses and he was completely quiet. He reminded me of this old famous picture of Bob Dylan, where his manager is trying to get him out of the car."

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"Which is what I was trying to do," Matolcsy interjected with a laugh.

"So I asked him why he didn't want to get out of the car," Herley continued. "And he didn't really talk that much then. But he said to me, 'I'm not sure how I feel.'"

And so the two first became acquainted, and then friends, and now are collaborating together. Herley is the perfect mentor for an emerging artist like Martel.

"One thing about Colby having Down syndrome," Matolcsy said. "People with Down syndrome have this sense of being completely okay in their body and space. Colby forges his own style. He decides what to wear and how he is going to look. He's doing a black tie with a white shirt lately. A lot of times he dresses like a character he wants to portray."

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An avid fan of Scooby Doo who for years, Colby has modeled himself after character Freddie with a uniform white shirt, blue pants and orange neck scarf. Martel also is fascinated by the characters in the Wizard of Oz, Michael Jackson, and Ace Frehley of KISS.

"A lot of times he lives in a world of higher intellect than people understand him to have. When he has moments where people clearly get that he knows or understands something, it is wonderful to see," said Matolcsy. "And a lot of his art creation is very much driven by his sensory experiences. Whether it's tactile, auditory, visual or a combination. He creates painting, music, acting."



In 2021 Colby Martel, left, enticed his mother Aranka Matolcsy to use a Wizard of Oz theme for their Halloween costumes. He went as the Scarecrow and wanted her to be the Cowardly Lion. *Supplied photo*

Martel never had the chance to know Lajos, but Matolcsy imagines that her son would give his grandfather, a classically trained artist and art professor, some lessons on their shared craft.

Lajos' art was of fineness, of detail in landscapes. Martel is totally free with his art, using vibrant colors, strong lines and bold shapes. His vision is decidedly abstract.

"My father was a realist, to the bone," Matolcsy said. "But his conceptualization of what is art would be pushed by experiencing Colby's. He often said that artists were missionaries whose work enlightened and lifted those around them. But art is not always for that. It is also for provoking questions.

"By my father's [definition], Colby is most definitely an artist. His work is an inspiration to many people. And he knows what he's doing. He knows when I ask him to sign things. He is clear about that – he knows he's working for an art show."

Herley is also an abstract artist and has found himself commiserating and collaborating with Martel as they prepare for their May showing together. Part of the exhibit includes their individual interpretations of a circle with a three-foot diameter.

"Colby's work on his circle is done with a chisel and hammer. He's drilled it so that it looks like the moon on one side," Matolcsy said. "He is impacted by sounds made [in his art]."



Colby Martel, who comes from a long line of artists, uses his own sense of creativity to express himself through drawing and painting. Martel is being featured in a showing, along with abstract artist Peter Herley, at the Lajos Matolcsy Arts Center in Norway, founded by and named for his grandfather. *Supplied photo*

"It has taken me a long time to understand what an incredibly complex set of needs somebody has when their world is sensory driven. Experiencing art is the most meaningful but comprehensive way to feed the senses, whether auditory, tactile, visual."

For his part, Herley is invested in promoting Martel's artistry. He shared a post of Martel in full Ace Frehley make-up and regalia with a friend of the musician that reached Frehley directly ("this kid shocked him", Herley said). He hopes Martel will demonstrate his musical abilities during their show.

"What I hope for Colby is to be high functioning, even though he has Down syndrome, autism, ADHD and some other diagnosis," Matolcsy said. "I hope that these experiences and this kind of intervention help that. And I am so grateful to the Western Maine Art Group for the opportunity to Colby."

"The inclusive and loving energy around WMAG is reflective of its early days" when Matolcsy's father Lajos founded the organization and helped create a vibrant arts culture in the western foothills of Maine.



Artists Peter Herley (left) and Colby Martel will be featured all month at the Western Maine Art Group's Lajos Matolcsy Arts Center in Norway. *Courtesy Aranka Matolcsy*

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