

1-13-1998

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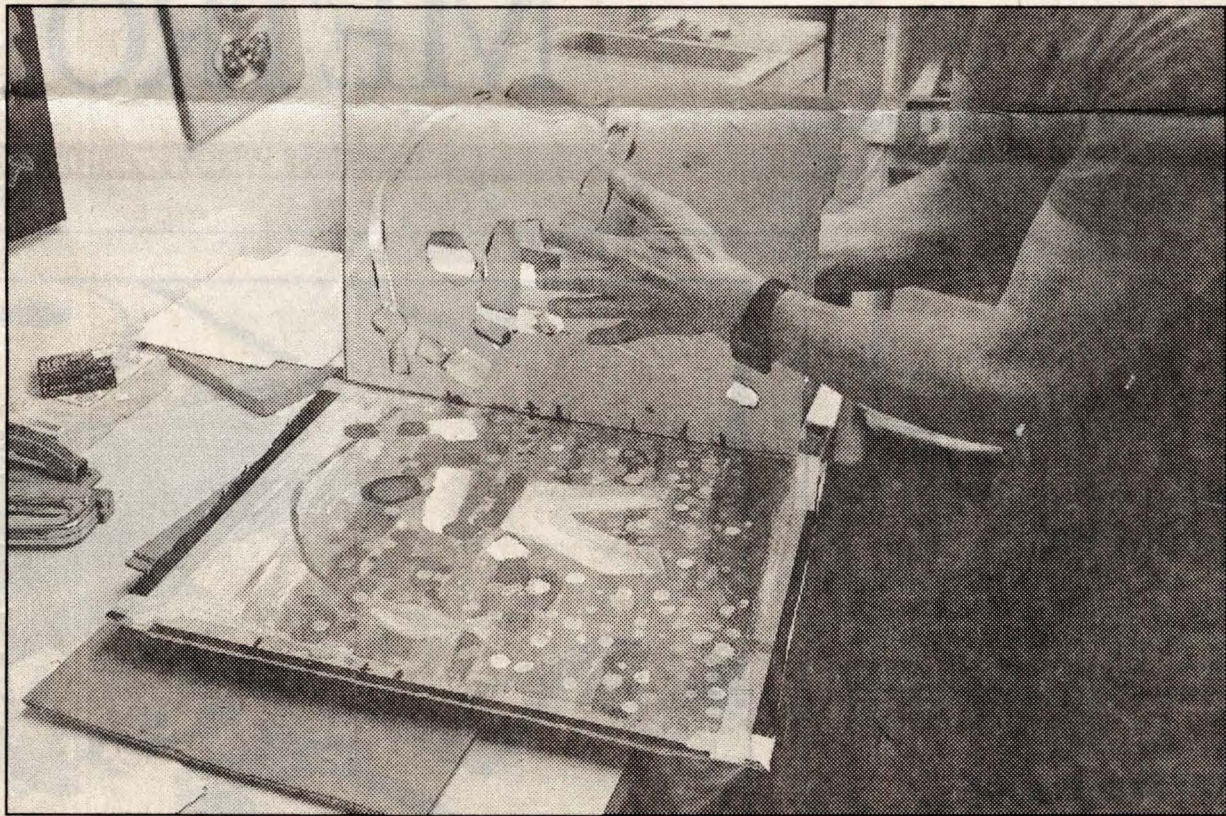


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Journal-Bulletin/KATHY BORCHERS

PORTFOLIO: Vicente Paratore took his canvases and his tools and returned to his native Argentina to demonstrate his painting technique and inspire government support for an expanded arts program for the disabled.

A vision for his native land

By C. EUGENE EMERY
Journal-Bulletin Staff Writer

CRANSTON — He learned how to paint again after a stroke left him virtually blind.

Now Vicente Paratore is using his art to draw attention to the plight of the handicapped in his native Argentina.

Paratore, who lives in the Auburn Park section of Cranston, says he plans to return to South America next month to help establish a new organization for the disabled.

The groundwork for the project was laid a year ago, when Paratore visited his sister in the Argentine town of San Martin and found that his paintings, created mostly by touch, generated a lot of media interest.

"It was so exciting. My nephew and niece went so crazy. They couldn't believe I could paint" in spite of the blindness, he said. "They started talking, and a couple days later, the newspaper came in and [eventually] I got all the publicity I needed to talk about handicapped people."

By the time he was done, his story had been in three newspapers, he had been featured on three radio stations and had a one-hour television program devoted to his work.

The publicity prompted calls from government officials interested in setting up a new agency to help the handicapped. Several of his old friends are also lobbying for the project.

"In three months there, I did what I didn't really expect to do in one year," he said. "I think I touched the hearts of a lot of people. That's really exciting."

Paratore's paintings have been in Yankee magazine and displayed at the Cranston Public Library. The United Way has cited his work in its promotional material as an example of how visual handicaps can be overcome.

So when he returned to Argentina for a visit, he rolled up some of the canvases, brought them with him, ended up staging a show in the City Hall building his father helped construct and found himself in the role of advocate for the handicapped.

Paratore said the government in his native land provides some services to people who are disabled, but they are limited.

"Right now, they are really very poorly organized. They don't really have much for the people who need it. We're lucky to be in this country because of all the services, all the

conveniences for the handicapped," said Paratore, who came to the U.S. in 1959 and has been a citizen since 1978.

"We have hot lunches. We have In-Sight (a radio-reading program for the blind, financed by United Way). There's everything in this country," he said. "Over there, they have nothing. They don't even have talking books."

Those are some of the things he would like to see handicapped Argentinians have.

"That's what I want to do," he said. "I have a lot of friends there who can help me do a lot of things."

Paratore said he also wants to encourage businesses in Argentina to contribute to the effort.

Corporate donations to worthy causes "are not as common as they are here," he said. "They don't really want to give the money away. Perhaps they can give some donation and (the government) can give back some of their taxes."

It's quite a challenge, but Paratore said he is used to tackling challenges, and he's optimistic that he'll be able to make a difference in his native country.

"I think," he said, "it's going to work out fantastic."