

# Selma Times-Journal



Mike Autrey, Director of Consumer Relations for the Alabama Department of Mental Health, looks over a painting he would later buy during the Visionary Art Guild for Mentally Ill Artists at the Carl C. Morgan Convention Center Thursday morning. (Jay Sowers/Times-Journal)

By [Jay Sowers](#)

## Art show displays vision of state's mentally ill

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Thursday's Visionary Guild for Mentally Ill Artists art and poetry show in Selma was a chance for artists from across the state to showcase their works and artistic vision.

Mike Autrey, Director of Consumer Relations for the Alabama Department of Mental Health, was in attendance Thursday at the Selma Convention Center, and said the event was a welcome occasion for the general public to get a firsthand look at their paintings and poems.

"People with mental illness have so few opportunities to be something other than just somebody with a mental illness and few options to interact with the community as a whole," Autrey said. "And art is one avenue for them to break through those barriers."

With two hundred artists and community members milling about the building, Autrey said the informal event was bigger and better than he had expected.

“When I go to an art show, I am used to going to one where the paintings are on the wall, and I told someone beforehand that I wasn’t sure about this format, but they proved me wrong,” Autrey said. “It was a great success.”

Lafon Barlow, executive director of the Cahaba Center for Mental Health, said she was impressed by Thursday’s turnout.

“I couldn’t believe everybody from across the state came together in Selma today,” Barlow said. “It was awesome to see artists from Birmingham, Huntsville and Evergreen. The whole state really turned out today.”

Ethel Green, Assistant Executive Director of National Alliance on Mental Illness of Alabama, said the quality of the art and the vision of the artists are what impressed her most Thursday.

“It’s remarkable to see the visions they have and it’s so vitally important for people with a mental illness to have a vision and be able to produce something. To lose yourself in art is an amazing process.”

One of the artists, Birmingham native Mary Rembert brought several pieces to the show and said the craft is something she was excited to share with others.

“I’m a folk artist, but as I’ve started doing more and more painting I’ve been able to discover more skills and put more meaning in to the paintings,” Rembert said. “My favorite thing about painting is that I get motivated and spirit-filled when it’s just me and that canvas.”

A portion of the money raised during the show would go directly to the Visionary Art Guild.