

Artist: 'I come to know my pieces ... through touching

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But the Mason Murer show consists entirely of work Eddy has completed since meningitis took most of his sight in May 2000.

The disease is an infection of the tissues, or meninges, surrounding the brain and spinal cord. The subsequent swelling of these tissues prevented substantial blood and oxygen from reaching his brain cells.

It's rare, Eddy said, that meningitis affects one's sight.

"I got sick on a Monday," Eddy said, "and spent a week at home, mostly with terrible headaches and nausea. Eight days later, on a Tuesday, I noticed a gray spot in my vision. On Wednesday, I woke up to totally blind."

Though he spent six weeks in the hospital and was told by doctors he'd never see again, Eddy never considered that his career was over.

Initially, he decided to reinvent himself as a sculptor. When he finally felt good enough to get out of bed, he began experimenting with large sheets of map board and dipping them into acrylic paint, which hardens into plastic.

His first completed project along these lines was a large (about 4 feet high) capsule of entangled, plasticized strips bent and curved, which he called "B.C. Shell" because it looked — or at least felt to his touch — like a dinosaur egg.

Around this time, unexpectedly, fragments of his eyesight began returning.

"Occasionally, I'd get these flashes, like a camera's flash-bulb," Eddy said, "and then maybe a week later, I would notice I was seeing a little more light. This went on for a few years ... but I haven't had any more improvement in about a year and a half."

Eddy's eyesight has acute limitations. He describes it as a



Allan Eddy shows off his work. The raised surfaces help him perceive different parts of the piece. RENEÉ HANNANS HENRY/Staff

"permanent thumbprint in the center of my vision, and I can see around this print, although I can't see anything below my eye level."

"Colors are strange," he said. "Blues and yellows are like neon — in a crowd they really stand out, while everything else recedes. Reds and greens go gray. When I see red by itself, often it looks orange."

With this partial restoration, Eddy started painting again. First he tried watercolors, then chalk pastel, but both methods proved too transparent and insubstantial for his taste and his sight.

So he started using just his hands and fingers, often, though not always, eliminating brushwork. In time, his canvases became buoyant with thicker textures, brighter colors and three-dimensional elements.

It was only logical that he combine these solid, very tangible painting techniques with sculpture. It wasn't only an artistic decision; it was also pragmatic.

"I have to really concentrate to actually see the surfaces of my paintings," Eddy said. "And with a large work, like ["Proof of Dragons"], I can't see the whole thing — I see it in parts. The way in which I actually come to know my pieces is through touching the surfaces."

"So you see," he said, smiling, "I am basically working by instinct."

Sprawling over a 48-by-72 inch canvas, "Proof of Dragons" is bursting with disjointed bones, cracked bones, decayed bones, and bones constituting

the fossilized dragon's spine, which nearly frames the portrait.

Each spinal segment bulges from the surface, giving the overall effect of a coiled mountain chain. Toward the bottom lies the dragon skull, three-dimensional like the spine, with horns, spiky teeth and a forlorn countenance.

But the piece's most startling feature are two perfectly formed wings sprouting from the canvas, on either side of the spine. The background colors are mostly dark, excepting an

occasional dab of turquoise that leaves a nostalgic twinge, it seems, of something not quite remembered.

In some ways, the pre-blindness period seems like eons ago. But if his work has changed, in style and materials, much of his world beyond painting hasn't. He still lifts weights, boxes and participates in full-contact karate — though his feet remain numb from the meningitis.

"Going into the gym," he

said, "is an a of mine. I ex surprising to using a white put the cane d gloves on."

He laughed remark, ostens ing, that also professional lif

"People ar how hard I pu "I'm not a big But I'm tough

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