

Exhibit shows artists' PLAN for dealing with mental illness

By Marjorie Preston
Correspondent

Lisa Chuan-Lee Cheng has been studying art in Ohio and New York City since the late '80s. Her brightly-colored, symbolic drawings have a fluid, fairy-tale quality. She works in a museum.

She also has to manage mental illness.

Those paths will intersect in a new exhibit.

Planned Lifetime Assistance Network of Northeast Ohio, a Lyndhurst-based non-profit whose mission is to help adults challenged by mental illness, will open a traveling art exhibit Sunday at Heights Arts Studio in Cleveland Heights. It features the work of PLAN members created in art classes, open studios or special workshops.

"I felt it was important to share my work in that context, to see if it could help other people," Cheng of Cleveland Heights said. "I think it will be helpful in reducing stigma."

Cheng does origami and has taught it in classes at PLAN, but watercolors are her true labor of love.

"I've been working with watercolor pencil drawings with sumi ink for the outlines, and then I color in with watercolor pencils. Then I dampen the pencil with a damp brush to blend the colors, and then put in a watercolor paint background so it's mostly watercolor pencil.

"Art therapists are there if I ever need help, like if I have a technical question. Sometimes they talk about the work, and it helps me have insight into



Lisa Chuan-Lee Cheng's art has fairytale-like qualities.

what it might mean," Cheng said.

The exhibit includes pastel drawings, paintings, watercolors and sculptures. Some will be for sale at planneohio.org. Most work will be priced from \$25-\$75.

Art and Poetry Coordinator Gretchen Miller works on PLAN's Art, Poetry and Mental Health Recovery Project.

"As an art therapist, I know creative expression can be very helpful in coping, relaxation and being able to communicate thoughts, words and feelings that might be difficult to relate verbally," Miller said.

"We have a holistic recovery program and a lot of the art in the exhibit comes out of that programming," she said.

PLAN helps patients and their families with problems like depression, bipolar mood disorders or schizophrenia.

"We've got people who are working in the community, volunteering, people who are

going to school or who have a master's degree and are doing well in recovery. Others may be on disability or in a group home. Local art therapists have been helping get people motivated and creating, and they're looking forward to showing their art," Miller said.

"We aim to show how creative expression aids in a member's recovery and educate the public viewing the exhibit about mental illness," she said.

The art will remain on display through Jan. 31 at Heights Arts Studio in the Cleveland Heights-University Heights Main Library, 2340 Lee Road, Cleveland Heights. Reception 2-4 p.m. Sunday. (216) 371-3344.

The exhibit will travel in February to the Cuyahoga County Community Mental Health Board, in March to CSU, in April to Bela Dubby, in May to Ursuline College and in June to Tri-C Metro.