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Artist captures 'joy of life'

Leawood artist Rita Blitt has given KU Edwards campus 130 pieces of her art **PAGE 4**



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KU Edwards campus to celebrate new Rita Blitt collection that captures 'joy of life'

BY SU BACON
Special to The Star

Art and academia will walk hand in hand on Aug. 16.

That's when the University of Kansas Edwards campus celebrates its collection of Rita Blitt artwork.

The campus is welcoming visitors to a walk through the halls to view the abstract drawings, paintings and sculpture Blitt recently gifted to the university.

"Warmth and vibrancy" have been added to blank walls since crews began hanging the 130-piece collection in May, said Carolyn McKnight, director of community relations and business development at the KU Edwards campus.

Blitt, 87, is an artist, sculptor and filmmaker from Leawood. Her work also appears on the KU campus in Lawrence at the Spencer Museum of Art and at other public places and in private collections worldwide.

She will be introduced during a reception from 5 to 7 p.m. Aug. 16. There will be guided and self-guided tours of three buildings housing her work.

Attendees will see the art the way students and faculty do on their way to classrooms or offices: As an invitation to pause and ponder a bristly sweep of black on paper



This is an untitled acrylic on paper by Rita Blitt. It is among 130 pieces of artwork Blitt gifted to the University of Kansas Edwards campus. A reception and tour of the buildings housing her work will be held on campus Aug. 16.

or bright swirls of orange on canvas.

"For me, it's a brain break," McKnight said. "On my way to a meeting, I look at the art and think about what the artist was thinking at that time."

What were the thoughts

guiding Blitt's hands?

Such titles as "Gratitude" and "Exploring" are purposefully vague. Blitt said she names her pieces only when asked to do so. She'd rather allow individuals to feel what they see than interpret their feelings with a title.

"The overriding theme is the joy of life," Blitt said.

She compares her painting process to "dancing on paper." Blitt listens to music as she creates and uses both hands to paint in much the same way a dancer

uses both feet or a conductor both hands.

Blitt will be introduced at the reception by Connie Gibbons, director of the Mulvane Art Museum on the campus of Washburn University in Topeka. Blitt gave some of her artwork to the museum in

Rita Blitt opening

BEST Conference Center, KU Edwards Campus, 12604 Quivira Road, Overland Park. 5 to 7 p.m., Aug. 16. Free and open to the public, but reservations are required at <https://learn.ku.edu/event/rita-blitt-collection>

2017.

"Rita's legacy will be how she forms and shapes future generations," Gibbons said.

Recently, for example, a Washburn art student created a work in response to one of Blitt's sculptures.

Gibbons describes Blitt as "joyful and exuberant."

Her work is a reflection of her personality and the drive that has spurred her career for more than 60 years.

"She has so much energy and passion for the creative," Gibbons said.

Blitt will be 88 in September and she shows no signs of slowing down or sitting out the next dance.

"I've created nonstop all my life," Blitt said. "Now I'm gifting nonstop."

So far, Blitt has donated artwork to more than 150 schools or nonprofit organizations.

Submitted