

UC San Diego

UC San Diego News Center

By Christine Clark

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Please Touch the Art

Campus crafts center to open new exhibit designed for visually impaired



Ahmet Ustunel is visually-impaired and an artist—he first started making sculptures when he was a child and has been taking classes in pottery-making at the Crafts Center for about two years.

UC San Diego is known for its world-renowned research and for being one of the hottest schools for science, but the campus also has robust programs in the arts and many offerings for students with creative interests. At the heart of the campus is the UC San Diego Crafts Center, where members of the campus and local community have the opportunity to make art ranging from ceramics to glassblowing and photography.

In addition to offering classes and workshops, the Crafts Center's Grove Gallery features ongoing exhibits in contemporary crafts and ethnic art. This month, the Crafts Center will launch the "Art U Can Touch" exhibit, which will run from Oct. 18 to Nov. 18. The art show is intended to help visually-impaired people overcome the barrier they experience at most museums by allowing everyone to experience art by touching. Sighted people will also learn to experience art without relying on their eyesight.

The idea for the Art U Can Touch exhibit was spurred by an encounter between two students, Helen Kagan and Ahmet Ustunel, who met in a ceramics class at the Crafts Center. "We noticed that blind people are usually not allowed to touch art in museums, so they are prevented from learning about the great masterpieces of every culture," Kagan said.

Ustunel is visually-impaired and an artist—he first started making sculptures when he was a child and has been taking classes in pottery-making at the Crafts Center for about two years.

"Since art is generally regarded as a visual aesthetic, many artists and museum visitors consider the sense of touch to be secondary," Ustunel said. "We wanted to emphasize a different aspect of art: tactile beauty."

As part of the campus's annual celebration of abilities month, members of the campus and local community are invited to the Art U Can Touch exhibit opening Friday, Oct. 21 from 6 to 9 p.m., where they can see and touch the art and meet some of the artists.

The exhibit will feature works from local artists, including members of the Crafts Center faculty, the San Diego Potters Guild, Sculpture Guild and Allied Craftsmen. In addition, works from visually-impaired artists will be on display.

The exhibit will feature a variety of media, including sculptures, ceramics, fiber arts, glass, metalworks and jewelry.

The art will showcase interesting textures and shapes; none of the pieces will be easily broken or dangerous to touch.

The UC San Diego Crafts Center provides personal enrichment and creative educational opportunities to students interested in making art that includes jewelry-making, drawing, lampworking, glassblowing, weaving and other crafts.



Ahmet Ustunel

Upcoming events at the Crafts Center include the winter sale from Nov. 28 to Dec. 1 where shoppers can buy unique jewelry, ceramics, glasswork and more, all made by Crafts Center faculty and students.

Fall registration for Crafts Center classes will continue until the week of December 3. For more information, go to: <http://crafts.ucsd.edu/>

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