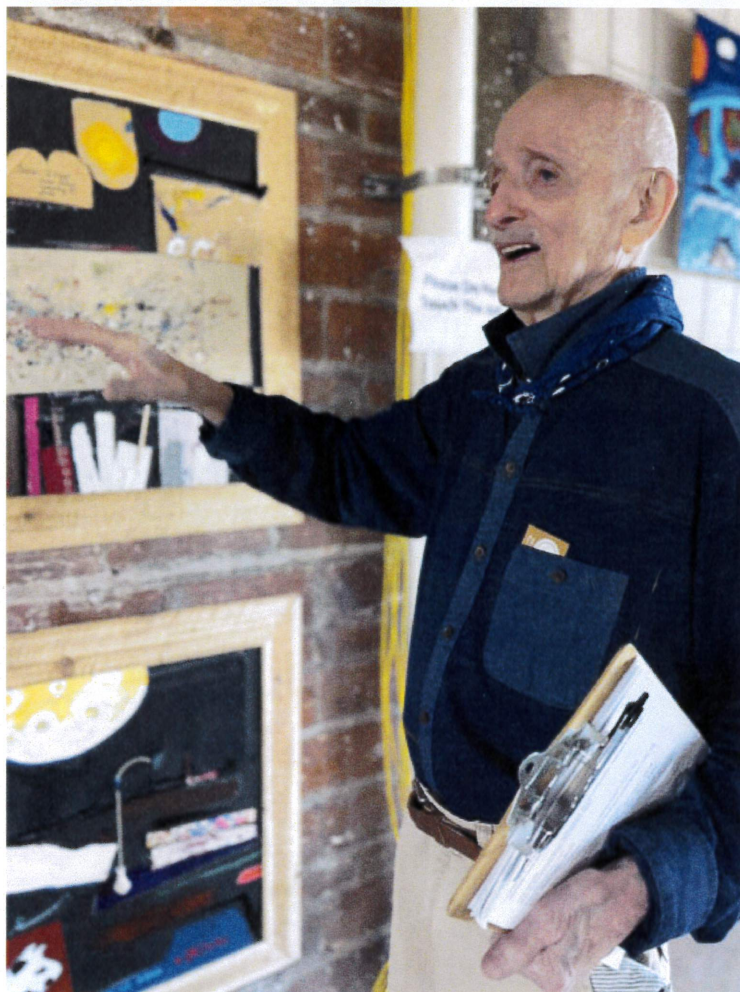


## Abstract artist not slowing down after 60 years

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Lorri Sughrue | Associate Editor



*Abstract artist Robert Blunk describes the process he used for one of his collages, that's on display in McCook with other pieces of his artwork. The show opens Friday at the Keystone and includes nearly 50 of his pieces, including sculptures, paintings and metal art.*

The name of the McCook show, “Mira! Mira!”, comes from a sabbatical the artist took in Puerto Rico when he noticed children running up and down the beach shouting “Look! Look!” when they found something interesting. Blunk likened that to artists sharing their work. “Isn’t that what artists are doing, saying look what I’ve found!” he said.

He grew up in Salyards, Kan., during the Depression, later serving in the Marines Corp. during World War II. He was stationed for a time in Guam, where he spent a lot of time in a small tent and on troop ships, Blunk said. After the war, under the GI Bill, he was accepted by MIT in Massachusetts for industrial design, because to him, industrial design was the perfect mixture of drawing and engineering, his two favorite areas, he said. But he took an art class at Kansas State University and that’s when his life changed, he recalled. “Later, I found out art is mostly work,” he added.

After graduating from the Kansas City Institute of Arts with a bachelor’s degree in 1950, Blunk was an art teacher and later earned his master’s in sculpture at Kansas State College, now Pittsburg State University. Beginning in 1962, he

McCOOK, Neb — The world is a canvas for Denver artist Robert Blunk, who will have an exhibition of his work displayed in McCook on Friday and Saturday.

After over 60 years of teaching and creating art, his work includes abstract paintings, metal art and sculptures now in the permanent collections of many museums and private collectors, along with several public installations of his art. And at 98, he may walk a little slower than he did before but his brain is always clicking about what he will create next.

He still paints at least a few hours a day and sometimes, “I’ll wake up at 3:30 in the morning and wonder, what would happen if I did this instead of that?” when it comes to a current piece he’s working on. Or, if a painting is not progressing the way he envisions, he’ll paint over it and start again. Among his current works in progress are several prototypes of a 10-foot tall woolly mammoth made out of steel, that he envisions for a public installation.

If you’re looking for representational paintings of fruit or windmills, you might be disappointed in his abstract work — or maybe just curious. And that’s okay with Blunk, as people bring with them their own experiences when looking at art, he said. The age-old question of “What is Art?” could be answered with, how the artist perceives the subject. In his work, objects and techniques are exaggerated, or deconstructed then re-constructed: think Van Gogh on steroids. “He’s very contemporary, you wouldn’t know the artist is nearly 100 years old,” said Chad Graff, owner of the 6th Floor at the Keystone, where the exhibit is located. Graff said he heard of the artist through a local friend, who is related to Blunk.



taught art at the university and continued to create his own art, including public sculptures and installations. His work is in the permanent collection of several museums, such as the Spencer Museum of Art, Lawrence, Kan., Hale Library, Manhattan, Kan., the Schingoethe Center, Aurora, Ill., the Beach Museum of Art at Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kan., and the New England Foundation for the Arts in Boston, Mass.

Some of the more interesting pieces in his McCook show are his found-art collages, which he described as more personal, or more “out on the edge.” For him, the collages are a visual exploration, where every found object, even the most mundane, has a story, a background to it. One collage features a strip of material from pants he wore while painting, spattered with paint, displayed geometrically along with items, including a piece of cardboard that listed deli orders from co-workers, discarded by a guy who came into a New York deli wearing a hardhat. “Anything you pick up has a history to it,” Blunk said.

Several themes re-occur in his work, such as cats. Although he doesn’t consider he and his wife as “cat people,” Blunk said he’s drawn to them anyway as “they’re always observing and don’t get too excited,” compared to dogs who can be more reactive. Many of his paintings also include the color white, which he traced back to the Navajo influences he had as a child.

“Mira! Mira!” contains about 50 pieces of Blunk’s work and opens Friday night at the 6th Floor at the Keystone Business Center, 4-7 p.m. and continues on Saturday, 10 a.m.- 2 p.m., with the artist present both days.

*Mira! Mira! An exhibit of the works of Robert Blunk will be on view through at least November 30, 2022, at the 6th Floor Project, 402 Norris Avenue, McCook, Nebraska. Please call or text (308)-340-7854 for an appointment.*



2009 painting, “Eight Fish and Man”