



ARTS & CULTURE STORIES

Art Insider: Fashion ads become intricate drawings, toilet paper holders are political

Written by [Lindsay Preston Zappas](#) Sep. 29, 2020 [ARTS](#)



Helen Rae, "Untitled (December 5, 2019)." Graphite and color pencil on paper, 2019, 16.5 x 7."Image courtesy of Tierra del Sol Gallery

At 82, Helen Rae is as prolific as ever, interpreting fashion ads into her own singular vision. Toilet paper holders convey a political message. Line drawings made in a meditative state convey a buzzing energy.

Helen Rae at Tierra Del Sol Gallery



Helen Rae, "Untitled (March 10, 2020)." Graphite and color pencil on paper, 2020, 24 x18."
Image courtesy of Tierra del Sol Gallery

Tierra del Sol is a nonprofit that empowers people with developmental disabilities through workforce, career, and arts development. Their Chinatown gallery outpost specifically features artists who work in the center's art studios.

[Currently on view](#) is a new exhibition of colored pencil drawings by the artist Helen Rae. The drawings, which take fashion ads as their source material, are masterfully composed. As Rae presses colored pencil to paper, she re-interprets the haute couture women she depicts, adding intricately striated patterns. She widens faces, broadens shoulders, elongates necks, and

embellishes clothing. Through her bold colors, cubist compositions, and intricate linework, Rae infuses each subject with a deep and pensive emotion that seems to connect directly with the viewer — an intensity not often found when flipping through the latest issue of Vogue.



Helen Rae working at the Tierra del Sol Studio. Image courtesy of Tierra del Sol Gallery

Helen Rae didn't start making art until she was in her 50s, and now she can't stop. Gallerist Paige Wery explains in a [walkthrough video](#) that "she hadn't really done any fine art making before her mom signed her up for the Tierra del Sol art program. She came and started learning from scratch how to draw, and really became an amazing artist."

Rae has been nonverbal and deaf since birth, but since finding art, she's been drawing Monday through Friday at the Tierra del Sol. Since COVID-19, the center has stopped offering in-person classes, and most students are connecting with each other and their art mentors at the center via Zoom. When it became clear that Zoom was a challenge for Rae, Tierra del Sol started taking a table, chair, and drawing materials to the group home where Rae lives. She is now able to continue making art every day in her front yard. "She's responding well and happy to be back at work," Wery explains.

On view: September 4 – October 23, 2020

This is an edited version of the article.

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