

Artist with Vision



GOLDEN SUNSET*†
20 x 24 - Oil

HELEN
HARRIS



HELEN HARRIS, The Blind Artist— ...With Vision

To most visual artists, light is the major ingredient in creation. Light defines form, color, and mood in art—but Helen Harris was forced to turn inward to find the light when she was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa (RP). Rather than retiring from life, she took brush in hand to illuminate the complex and darkening world of RP. Harris is no ordinary artist.

Only 37 years old with three children, Harris had been losing the light for some time but the insidious symptoms of RP masked the fact that she—like millions of others affected by this hereditary disease—was “legally blind.”

Although she had 20/20 eyesight, her field of vision was limited to a small pinhole of sight about the size of a straw, and she had already lost true color vision. Others would have surrendered to RP, but Harris was inspired to complete a large collection of art—all created while she was legally blind.

Harris began with oils, and soon developed a distinctive style of portraiture that brought feelings and experiences to life on canvas. In the American tradition of folk art, she had no formal training, but her work was guided and informed by a willingness to learn new mediums. She moved from oils to acrylics, and then to mixed media. She became hailed in the art world as the “Woman of Vision.”

In 1972, Harris’ two sons were diagnosed with RP. It was then that she realized her art could

be a way to bring public attention to the eye disease that will result in permanent and total blindness for Helen and her sons. She founded RP International (RPI) with the same kind of determination and ingenuity expressed in her extraordinary works of art. Harris has exhibited from Los Angeles to Philadelphia. These are diverse works that range in size from 8" x 10" to murals spanning 4' x 8', and they all fit into her driving desire to establish RPI as the premiere organization fighting blindness.

To launch public awareness of RP, Helen Harris and Charlton Heston created a public service announcement using her art to articulate the issues. She has been a guest on many national talk shows, including the Dinah Shore Show and the National Home Show. Always, her art provides a focal point for public understanding of the disease.



FAMILY*†
48 x 60 - Mixed Media

Helen Harris was honored by the National Charities Association, and her paintings were shown at the 1988 Charity Dinner in Washington, D.C. In Los Angeles, her works were displayed at the opening of “Vincent—The Musical” in 1980. She has shared exhibitions with other artists, including private showings with the photographs of Lydia Heston. Her work has earned critical acclaim as the finest of its genre.

Each new work of art in the "Love is Sharing" collection has been debuted at gatherings attended by celebrities and corporate representatives. Over 100 canvases hang in Helen Harris' Woodland Hills home. Her works are in the collections of Bob Hope, Smokey Robinson, George Burns, Patti LaBelle, and Stevie Wonder. In 1990, Harris presented a copy of "Love is Sharing" to President George Bush during a visit to the White House to campaign for more eye research funding.

Helen Harris was one of the exhibitors in the 1993 Very Special Arts Exhibit at Hanson Gallery in Beverly Hills. Two large pieces were featured in the show. "Love is Sharing," the title creation of her collection, is a classic mother/child image in multi-media. A contemplative piece bathed in shades of ochre-violet, alizarin-crimson, and tones of lavender-purple, "Love is Sharing" exemplifies the range of motion, feeling, and expression of Helen Harris. "The Family," a multi-media oil/acrylic canvas measuring 40" x 60" features a Monet-style technique, and was acknowledged as one of the most superb pieces in the exhibit.

Her art extends beyond the canvas to her crusade for public understanding and the funding for research, treatment, and cure of retinitis pigmentosa. Helen was told by many doctors such a goal was impossible, but using innate talent and the power of art, she has



LOVE IS SHARING*†
36 x 48 - Oil

helped foster research underway at several major universities, and recently launched the first ever laboratory dedicated to RP research at Louisiana State University.

Helen Harris is now the President of Retinitis Pigmentosa International and a successful artist, but 20 years ago, she was a housewife and mother coping with the devastating news of her diagnosis. In time, RP robbed her of her sight, and thus, her ability to paint. Harris has not seen her own paintings for many years, and there will never be another Helen Harris original—but her vision lives on in the images she has culled from her experience.

Exhibition information about Helen Harris' art is available from RP International at: P.O. Box 900, Woodland Hills, California 91365, (818) 992-0500 or (800) FIGHT-RP.



REMOVING THE COLOR*†
36 x 48 - Oil



GRANDFATHER
30 x 30 – Acrylic



HAS BEN FLOOZIE
30 x 38 – Charcoal & Acrylic



FEELINGS*†
42 x 33 – Acrylic



JED†
20 x 16 – Oil



BLUE WINTER†
20 x 16 – Oil



CREATION*
24 x 48 – Acrylic



MORNING AT THE BEACH†
30 x 30 – Acrylic



MOTHER WITH CHILD
30 x 30 – Acrylic



SNEAKING AWAY
36 x 24 – Oil



SLEEPING BOY
36 x 36 – Acrylic



VAN GOGH*
18 x 20 – Acrylic



WAILING WALL*
30 x 30 – Acrylic