

ELEVATING THE SPIRIT THROUGH ART

Gift of Art to Health Science Center Honors Art Program's Founder

By Michelle G. McRuiz

Throughout the 20th century, New Mexico attracted countless artists who drew inspiration from the natural beauty and diverse cultures around them. Two of those influential artists, Beatrice Mandelman (1912-1998) and Louis Ribak (1902-1979), created hundreds of works. One year before her death Beatrice established the Mandelman-Ribak Foundation to preserve the works and to promote the study of the couple's contributions to contemporary art. The Mandelman-Ribak Foundation recently donated 14 paintings by the couple to the UNM Health Sciences Center (HSC) Art Program in honor of the program's founder, Jonathan (Jon) Abrams, M.D.

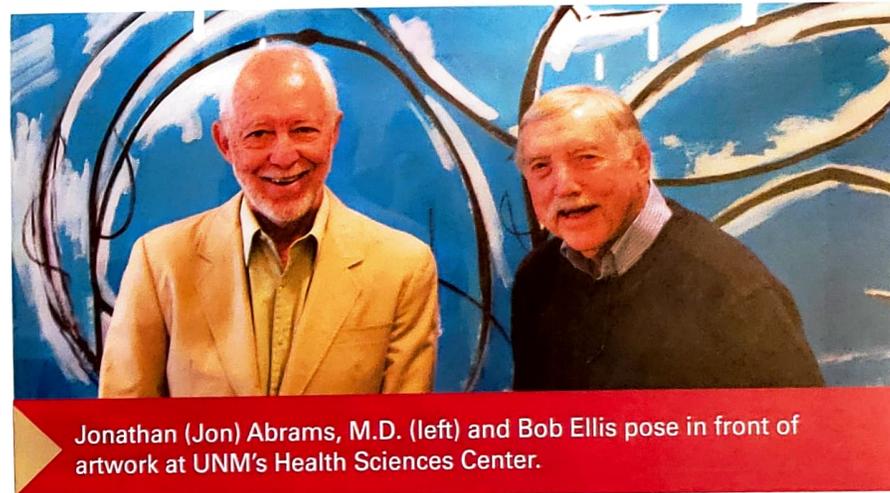
"Because of Jon's starting this wonderful collection and the need for more works of art for the growing health facilities at UNM, the foundation wanted to donate this group of work in honor of him," said Bob Ellis, a longtime friend of Jon's who serves on the Mandelman-Ribak Foundation Board of Trustees.

Unexpected Art

Jon began collecting art in the early 1960s. "There was no magic wand; I wasn't aiming for anything," he said. "One day I realized I had a collection."

"Jon is a compulsive buyer," added Bob, who also has gifted his own work to the HSC Art Program. "He has a fabulous eye."

Jon channeled that eye and his desire to bring relatively unknown artists to the public in a novel way: by launching a gallery at the HSC. Patients and their families have expressed appreciation at having original works of art to distract them from the often emotional business of appointments, surgeries and hours of waiting.



Jonathan (Jon) Abrams, M.D. (left) and Bob Ellis pose in front of artwork at UNM's Health Sciences Center.

Photography: Christian Horstmann

"The gallery is still what it was 20 years ago," said Jon. "People love color and abstraction. They see art they would not see anywhere else. Artists give art to this collection because it will be seen, and that's important. [The art] has a life and continues on," Jon said.

Vital Supporter

The Mandelman-Ribak Foundation's gift "legitimizes" the program's mission, said Jon, and "the dream that we would actually have top-caliber art brought to a medical institution that cares for people who otherwise would never see it and who have never heard of [Mandelman and Ribak]."

"Dr. Abrams has played a vital role as a collector, advocate and supporter of contemporary art in New Mexico," said Alexandra Benjamin, executive director of the Mandelman-Ribak Foundation. "The foundation is delighted to support this program with our gifts of art works. We appreciate and support the concept that art can elevate the spirit, and hope these beautiful works will enliven, inspire and bring joy to UNM Hospital." ■