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Blackfeet artist highlights Disability Awareness Month at UM

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MISSOULA—

Blackfeet Indian artist, cowboy and Vietnam veteran Ernie Pepion will present a slide show and video documentary on his life and art Tuesday, Oct. 26, at The University of Montana.

“Ernie Pepion: The Art of Healing,” will take place from 7 to 8:30 p.m. in the University Center Commons, to highlight Disability Awareness Month. The presentation is free and open to the public.

Pepion, who has been unable to use his arms or legs since a 1971 car accident, expresses himself through paintings he creates with the help of a custom mechanical easel. His paintings reveal a longing for love and mobility, the contradictions of life on the plains in a wheelchair and the fragility of life, nature and culture.

“In my life I have experienced discrimination, first as an Indian growing up near a reservation border-town while attending a predominately non-Indian school, and later as a quadriplegic,” Pepion says in a museum program. “I’ve been belittled and pitied. I have seen that some people, in ignorance, behave as though they are superior to those who are not of their race or who are disabled. They avoid interacting with those who are unlike them.

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"Through painting I show my experience of these degradations. Painting allows me to be a person beyond the limitations of racial prejudice and disability. Art enables me to address feelings that are difficult for me to write or even talk about."

Pepion has a bachelor of arts and a master of fine arts from Montana State University. He lives in Bozeman.

His presentation is sponsored by UM’s Multicultural Alliance, Diversity Advisory Council, Disability Services, Associated Students of The University of Montana, Upward Bound, McNair Scholars Program, Native American Studies, and Rural Institute on Disabilities.

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