



Ellen Cook, a friend of the Wielgus family, wears a barrette Raymond Wielgus created in 1982 during a reception at the Roswell Museum and Art Center, Friday. The barrette features gold inlay similar to the detailing on the exhibit's guns. (Emily Hubbell Photo)

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[Art exhibit opening draws crowd](#)

Saturday, June 12, 2010

Artists, connoisseurs and curious community members gathered at the Roswell Museum and Art Center Friday evening to catch the first glimpse of the museum's newest exhibit.

About 100 people attended the opening reception for "Raymond Wielgus: A Connoisseur's Eye," an exhibit featuring 40 guns artist Raymond Wielgus embellished during the last 35 years of his life. He transformed the guns by inserting gold inlay into hand-carved grooves, hand-carving ivory grips and dyeing the base steel with blueing techniques and acid baths.

"He had a real sense of presentation. He totally understood what would work visually and technically," said DeAnn Melton, a longtime friend of the Wielgus family who drove from Tucson, Ariz., to attend the exhibit. The showing includes a portrait Melton painted of the artist and his wife, both now deceased.

Although some visitors said they attend every art show at RMAC, others said the Wielgus exhibit's unique

subject matter drew them to Friday's event.

"It's spectacular, the fact that the gentleman had the vision to do this. To me this doesn't portray violence," said Judith White, an RMAC regular.

Don Ervin, of California, was in town visiting friends when he heard about the exhibit. He said it appealed to his law enforcement background.

"I see these as weapons, but they're absolutely beautiful. I've carried a lot of different weapons during my career and I can appreciate quality when I see it," he said.

Drawn by his interest in gun collecting, Mario Silvas attended the exhibit with his mother. He said he appreciates Wielgus' designs, especially because he has seen most of the models non-engraved.

Museum staff stressed the unique appeal of the exhibit.

"This topic is a little more far-reaching. I anticipate it's going to bring in a more diverse crowd," said Caroline Brooks, RMAC assistant director.

Brinkman Randle, a member of the museum's board of directors, said the collection could appeal to a niche in the community interested in Western heritage.

Sponsored by the Roswell Museum and Art Center Foundation, Wiley Maloney and Larry's Gun Shop, the exhibit runs through Jan. 2.

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