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Purposeful paintings

Houston cow artist passionate about his work with terminally ill

By MARY LEE GRANT
Chronicle Correspondent

Kermit Eisenhut sits at his dining room table in paint-spattered jeans and a T-shirt. Large colorful canvasses are stacked against the wall. A bright painted cow stares at him from across the room. A mannequin on which he is designing a seascape stands beside him.

Eisenhut's whimsical, colorful paintings have made him one of Houston's most popular artists. He created 14 brightly-painted cows for the Houston Cow Parade to benefit Texas Children's Cancer Center, and his paintings can be seen in galleries and restaurants throughout the city.

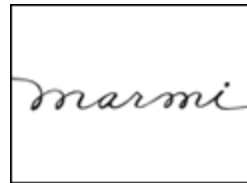
But his conversation seldom turns to himself. He is more likely to discuss the literally dozens of charities he supports or to talk of his greatest passion -- teaching art to people with terminal illnesses at area hospitals and the Art League of Houston.

At the Art League, he teaches free classes to HIV-positive individuals, designed to bring healing and increase self-esteem.

"When people do art, they are able to forget their illness for a little while," Eisenhut said. "The world enlarges for them. They are able to get out of themselves, to focus on something else. It can even take them away

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