Kimberly Singletary’s painting, “A Fantasy Land,” illustrates a house with children playing in the large, flower-filled yard, while birds fly overhead on a sunny day. This was one of 18 paintings on display in the 14th annual Harlem Horizon Art Studio exhibition entitled “A New Vision” in the Low Library Rotunda during the month of February in honor of Black Heritage Month. Titles such as “The American Tree,” “The Peace Post,” and “Brothers and Sisters” No. 1 and No. 2 reflect the range of this year’s works.

“A Fantasy Land” captures the spirit of the Harlem Horizon Art Studio, which offers a safe haven and outlet for expression for hospital patients recovering from chronic illnesses, such as AIDS and sickle cell anemia, or learning to cope with the pain of debilitating injuries. The program also provides safe after-school programs for neighborhood and outpatient children.

Since the Harlem Horizon Art Studio opened in January 1989, more than 1,600 children, 100 parents and other adults have participated in the program. A core group of 17-20 young people regularly attend the program, which meets four days a week on the 17th floor of the Harlem Hospital Center, led by painter and textile artist Allison Simpson. There, they work with professional artist’s materials, usually acrylic on canvas, and in a wide range of sizes.

By encouraging creative expression instead of directing it, Simpson and Orville Anderson, an artist who has been active in the program for a number of years, create an environment that assists patients in the healing process. They report that several young artists have regained mobility and physical control through painting.

Works by Harlem Horizon Art Studio artists have been included in 26 exhibitions in the New York metropolitan area, including: Ricco/Maresca Gallery in Tribeca, the Harlem School of the Arts, the architectural firm of Kohn Pedersen Fox and the Joyce Mertz-Gilmore Foundation, which purchased seven paintings for its newly renovated headquarters. Paintings from the Studio have been in a traveling exhibition that toured the United States for two years.

With the enthusiastic efforts of Ellen Gierson, associate dean of the Harlem Hospital Center; Barbara Barlow, chief of pediatric surgery; and Susan Weeks, previously the pediatric trauma coordinator, the studio was established 14 years ago by the artist Bill Richards, working as a volunteer, as part of the Harlem Hospital Injury Prevention Program in the division of Pediatrics and Pediatric Surgery.

“The Harlem Hospital Injury Prevention Program was developed to address the staggering number of preventable pediatric deaths and injuries we were seeing in the emergency department,” says Barlow. “The injury rate for children in Harlem was two times the city rate before this program began. By giving children safe places to play and safe activities, such as the Art Studio, the rate for major injuries requiring hospitalization has decreased 60 percent. Today, 27 similar programs are operating throughout the country, and an additional 13 are coming this summer.”

“A New Vision” exhibition is sponsored by Columbia’s Office of Government and Community Relations. The Harlem Horizon Art Studio is supported in part by Columbia Community Service, which distributes funds donated by Columbia University faculty and staff to community service programs in the neighborhoods surrounding the University.

The Harlem Horizon Art Studio is supported by the May and Samuel Rudin Family Foundation and the Emily Davie and Joseph S. Kornfeld Foundation. Additional funding has come from the Roy and Nuita Titus Foundation, the Helena Rubinstein Foundation, and Columbia Community Service. The Committee for Interns and Residents has funded the purchase of art materials.