

Artist of the month talks painting, creative process, Gallup arts scene

Written by By Cody Begaye Sun Correspondent
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What started as something to pass the time, turned into an exciting and rewarding career choice for one local artist.

Adam Maria, of Ramah, said he has been painting and drawing since he was in high school.

“[Drawing] was all I really wanted to do,” Maria said Sept. 11 when talking with the *Sun*.
“Looking back at my school grades, I saw I got a lot of A’s in drawing and welding courses.”

ENGAGING WITH LOCAL ARTS

Maria said he decided to pursue the arts professionally, which led him to attend the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe in 2006 and graduate with a B. A. in 2012.

The mission of IAIA is to “to empower creativity and leadership in Native Arts and cultures through higher education, life-long learning and outreach,” according to their website.

“I learned most everything I understand about art there,” Maria said.

Once Maria returned to the reservation, he said he did not have access to the sculpting tools he had at IAIA, which led him back to drawing and acrylic painting.

This decision led him to apply to a show put on by GallupARTS in 2017. That was the start of his involvement with the gallery.

After finding success at this first show, Maria began to exhibit his creations in other local shows, and participated in the art show at the Gallup Inter-Tribal Indian Ceremonial for the first time in August.

His piece, *With Beauty*, a 5” by 7” drawing and colored pencil piece on grey tone paper, was awarded a first place ribbon during the ceremonial.

THE PROCESS OF CREATING

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Maria said he begins each piece, such as the samples he shared with the *Sun*, with a drawing.

“Without that, it doesn’t look good,” he said.

Once he is satisfied with the drawing, Maria applies the paint to the piece, which then takes it into a new process.

“With paint, I try to get the lighting and three-dimensional aspect down,” Maria said. “Then it’s the color, and making sure I get the exact tones I want.”

In his works of realism, such as portraits of people or animals, Maria said he complements the subject with an abstract background that helps the realism of the subject stand out.

“It all comes together and creates a picture,” Maria said.

With the human portraits, Maria said he uses a photo of a person as a reference, and makes sure to make one part of the subject look as realistic as possible.

One of his pieces depicts a woman with a necklace, which Maria said would help the person’s face stand out from the rest of the work.

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

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“When you see a blank canvas, it can be a struggle to get started,” Maria said. “You put it off.”

But the process of creating a drawing or painting gets easier from there, he continued.

“Once you get something on the canvas, you get an idea of how you want to make it look,” Maria said. “That’s the easy part.”

The feeling of satisfaction after a piece is completed propels Maria forward to his next effort.

“That’s pretty much it,” he said. “Then you start the whole process over.”

Maria said some of his smaller drawings and paintings have been completed in about a day, and the largest painting he has ever done took upwards of a month to finish.

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

“I do want to go bigger,” Maria said. “I want to have models and a whole setup in a landscape setting [to paint].”

He added he wants to get back into sculpting, one of the techniques he picked up while attending IAIA, and make human figures for future works.

“I want to apply to the Santa Fe Indian Market and do that as well.”

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To see more of Adam Maria's drawings and paintings, visit his Instagram page at [instagram.com/weldingart21/](https://www.instagram.com/weldingart21/)

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