

Artist of the Month Aaron Yazzie speaks through his work

Written by By Dee Velasco For the Sun
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The mixed media artist's debut show runs until mid-May

Local Navajo and Diné artist Aaron Yazzie describes his art as an effort to create meaning when his environment offers none. A mixed media artist from Bread Springs, N.M., Yazzie, who has been making art professionally for the past five years, is currently debuting his work at the Octavia Fellin Public Library in a show that will run through mid-May.

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Twenty-three-year-old Yazzie said he became interested in art at an early age. Whether he was outside playing with clay or making drawings on his Etch A Sketch, he said his interest in art grew out of being a creative person. He decided to pursue art as a career soon after he was accepted to the Institute of American Indian Art.

Yazzie said art is like a language, which allows him to communicate with people visually. Yazzie identifies as a shy person and said his art captures who he is. Focusing on mixed media work helped him find his niche.

“I looked at different types of art. You can go particularly into acrylic, oils, and drawing, but I just realized that mixed media was a combination of all of them and that really appealed to me,” Yazzie said. “I can keep adding to it as much as I can, so there really isn’t any restrictions, as (opposed) to others where there are restrictions. But with mixed media, I feel the limitations are at a distance, so I can do more with it and the mistakes I make with it are more interesting as opposed to one form of media.”

Yazzie said this method came to him during his undergraduate studies at IAIA, where one of his instructors helped him define his talent. Yazzie describes his work primarily as two-dimensional art, which incorporates a lot of material.

“There’s this dynamic you can achieve with mixed media art and that is my chosen discipline at this point,” he said. “As for my themes, it has to do with my own personal search for reality. In this time and age, we are so distracted with everything, I feel it has to do a lot with our connection with nature, our connection to the spiritual world, our connection with other entities, so art is a good way to explore that.”

An avid reader, Yazzie’s influences include philosopher Simone Weil, artist and poet William Blake, and Native American artist Rick Bartoe. Being a member of the Navajo Nation, Yazzie uses these influences and bits of his culture to expand on his art.

“Growing up in this century we are so exposed to a lot of belief systems,” Yazzie said. “I’m not purely into the traditional Navajo belief. I take properties of different beliefs into my work and

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integrate them and make comparisons and contrasts between them. It's an array of cultures."

Yazzie said his work inspires a range of responses, from bewilderment to simply trying to decipher the message that he is conveying to the public. Two of his paintings, entitled "Superstitions" and "Reaching for Harmony," represent difficult moments in his life.

"It's more philosophical, our state of human beings," Yazzie said. "I was going through a rough time in my life, I was reading different poetry. The poetry was an expression of trying to reach out, trying to find meaning in a meaningless environment."

At the library, where Yazzie's work is currently on view, one visitor found the pieces left her with questions. Ruby Ella pointed out some of the darker images in the work.

"I can see various images of dark sequences, yet it also takes you to a place where he's trying to convey other messages," Ella said. "It's really dark with a mixture of death, really freaky."

Another visitor at the library, William Krause, took a moment to view Yazzie's work. He said he was taken aback by the use of psychedelic colors.

"I really like this piece and the use of how he swirls the colors around," Krause said. "No wonder it's called 'Superstitions.'"

Yazzie will be graduating this spring with his bachelor's of fine arts in studio arts from IAIA. He plans on later attending the University of New Mexico to obtain his master's degree in fine arts.

Aaron Yazzie's works can be seen through the middle of May at the Octavia Fellin Public Library on 115 Hill Avenue. For more information, call (505) 863-1291. You can contact Aaron Yazzie at aaronyazzie49@yahoo.com.

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