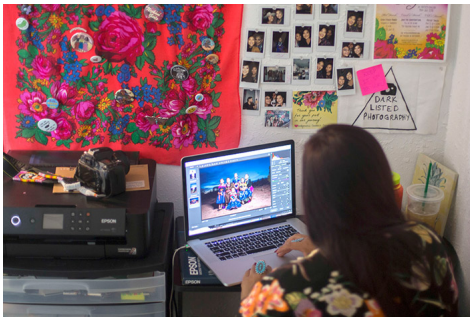


Inspiring others through photography

Written by By Dee Velasco For the Sun
Friday, 03 August 2018 03:11



Hannah Manuelito uses photography to share her heritage

Specializing in portrait photography, fine art photography, and fashion photography, Diné photographer Hannah Manuelito uses these topics to inspire and tell others about her Navajo culture.

Manuelito, who is from Ganado, Ariz., graduated from Arizona State University with a Bachelors of Fine Arts in Photography. Then fresh out of college, she had a stint at a Native American clothing company called “OXDX,” where she was their go-to-photographer and make-up artist. It was here where she became heavily involved with fashion photography, which she says was a great opportunity to push herself creatively.

Recently, as the artist-in-residence at the ART123 gallery, Manuelito works as a freelance photographer during the summer where she takes on side jobs photographing just about

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anything, including children portraits.

Since childhood, she has been interested in all aspects of arts. Her interest in photography peaked while in high school. When asked what she calls her style of photography, well, she hasn't given it much thought until recently.

"I would have to describe it as me representing my culture and my family," she said. "I guess through that I like to show the boldness of it. I like to have a lot of color, and personality whether it's with a person or an object that I am photographing. I like to get that bold expression from it."

I cannot do any three-dimensional form of art (laughing) to save my life," she added. "It's not my favorite. I can draw and paint, but my heart is just not in it, so I prefer doing photography."

Manuelito says there's more to photography than pointing and shooting objects or people. With fine art photography, to goes beyond making something look pretty or good, she explained. It's really all about making a story, and expressing oneself in a series of photographs.

"It can be something based off your identity or finding yourself, expressing that through your photographs," she said. "I learn more about my culture through photographing different stories on my uncles, or family that have taught me. I take those stories and try to put them in photographs so that I can better understand the traditional aspects of being Navajo."

She often hears that photography is not considered a form of art or viewed in that way.

"People don't understand that it takes a lot of creativity and a lot of work to execute a photograph the way you want it," she said. "Especially with lighting, if you're going into a photo shoot and a person wants a specific style, then you need specific lighting or whatever else you need. It takes a whole production, and people don't realize that until someone shadows me or comes visit, and they see how I work and then they realize that its much more than just clicking a button (laughing)."

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Currently, Manuelito is working on a series of photographs which is called “Asdzaan” meaning woman in Navajo. It’s about the matriarchs of her family. It’s about how she views the matriarchs in her family, which she says is inspired by the baroque painting of the Virgin Mary in that style.

“The draping of the robe and fabric is what I kind of did with the women I grew up with and looked up to and were taught by.”

Manuelito says she hopes to inspire the younger generation to pursue art. Growing up, she says she never had a clue on what art meant or how to create her own work. She says even with workshops provided for children, no one tells them it’s okay to be an artist, or even tell them they’re capable of achieving those goals.

“Everyone pushes that you have to be this or go to school,” she said. “That’s all good and everything, but sometimes their heart and mind are just not into it. They just don’t think that way. It’s very hard and it can just crush a child’s thought process, and I just want people to know they can pursue the arts process. I just want to inspire others overall and to have my work really showcase the general beauty of my culture and my family.”

For more information on Hannah Manuelito visit her on Facebook or email: [hannahmanuelito@gmail](mailto:hannahmanuelito@gmail.com), or www.hannahmanuelitophotography.com

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