

Navajo artist transfers his dreams onto canvas

Written by By Dee Velasco For the Sun
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Calling himself 'the Dream Artist,' Narbono Begay paints what he dreams

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At the end of a hard day, we all look forward to getting a peaceful night of rest. When our head hits that pillow, it's off to dream land and for 36-year-old Narbono Casimere Begay, it's his gateway for inspirations for his future paintings.

Being a full-blooded Navajo artist, Begay considers himself a semi-professional, self-taught painter. Born and raised in St. Michaels, Ariz., his only form of art was silversmithing, taught to him by his dad. He started making earrings and bracelets, and that was the extent of it.

As he grew up he worked various spot jobs in construction here and there, and never had a notion to explore art. When he did draw, it was just for fun and as he put it — he simply wasn't good at it.

"I sucked at drawing when I was a kid, just like everybody else (laughing)," he said. "I couldn't even draw a stick figure. That's how bad I was."

Then one day in 2008, art began to take shape within Begay. A friend asked him to draw a Valentines' Day card and his friends began to comment on how good his drawings were. He started doing pencil art and soon his friends bought him a beginner's paint set, after which they were even more impressed. After this, Begay says he was hooked.

"At the beginning, mainly all my influences were random people telling me how my pencil drawings were," he said. "I tell people that my talent finally came out, and it's funny because they ask how long I have been drawing and I tell them I just barely started, not too long ago."

Since 2015, Begay has gone professional after selling his first painting at the Gallup ArtsCrawl for \$1,400. Primarily painting with acrylic on canvas, he likes painting animals, Anasazi references, and the history of the Native American.

Aside from all this, what makes Begay a unique artist is that he dubbed himself as *Narbono DreamArtist*

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Begay says he gets a lot of inspiration from his dreams. Dreams give him meaning, feelings, and some very vivid visuals.

“I’ve had these dreams where I see weird faces, and other things that I incorporate ... into my paintings. I’ve had dreams so vivid that tell a lot about myself [sic] and I express them out on canvas. I also want to see shadows, depths, and 3-dimensional in my drawings, I want to see them really come out. I use a lot of stars, I’ve been using a lot of blending currently, I’m just trying different styles right now, and what looks good and what doesn’t for me right now.”

Begay remembers that when he emerged as a professional, he found it hard to get into the art circle. He didn’t know even how to begin or where to start. He even asked other artists, but they were of no help.

He didn’t know about the art markets that were held here in the Southwest. He said he had to go out and find out how to set up his work. He went to Santa Fe, Phoenix, Ariz. and other places to see how other artists promoted and sold their paintings.

“Once I became seasoned, I started putting in applications to art shows and now I’m familiar with the territory of how to do it,” he said. “Today, I’ve done over 20 shows and my paintings have gone as far as Texas.”

He recalls how surprised he was at how many people liked his paintings at his first art show.

“I couldn’t believe they really liked my paintings and would just stand there looking and thinking as they stare ... I try to be different and with my style, using my culture.”

For now, Begay says he’s using this down time to paint more small paintings and getting his inventory ready for the next year. Although, having a few years under his belt as a professional artist, Begay feels he is still learning and is using the time off to enhance his talent. He says he wants to experiment with colors and fit those colors to what he feels.

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“I think a lot about the major artists of how they had to mix colors, I try to force myself to find those colors,” he said. “I want to find my own colors, hue, and feel pretty confident. It’s exciting, fun, and it’s the colors that make it fun. It’s also very stressful and if you don’t find the right color that can be very discouraging. I tell myself to keep going and to not give up.”

For more information on Narbono DreamArtist visit: shopnavajo.com

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