

'BeCause' gives people an entry point into difficult topics

Written by By Molly Ann Howell Sun Correspondent
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Show features five different artists covering five social justice topics

When a multitude of artists applied for the Guest Curated shows at gallupart123, Executive Director Rose Eason knew something had to be done in order to honor as many of the great artists as possible. That's why she and the committee in charge of Guest Curated shows decided to do four shows with individual artists, and then save a fifth show for multiple artists.

That's how "BeCause" came to be. "BeCause" features five different artists, and each of them is exploring a social justice topic that is important to them.

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When asked how art can play a role in social justice, Eason explained that it can open up a discussion about difficult topics.

“I think art is such an incredible and unique vehicle for dialogue because it gets you thinking in different ways, it opens your eyes literally to different perspectives,” Eason said. “When you have artwork to talk about, I think the issues become a little bit more accessible because everyone can come around a common reference and discuss that, and the discussions are about what each other sees in the artwork, and that kind of gives a different entry into these hard topics.”

The show covers the topics of homeless, alcoholism, the missing and murdered Indigenous women movement, and cultural preservation. The artists used a range of mediums to share their messages, including mixed media, paintings, sculptures, and even fashion pieces.

THE MMIW MOVEMENT

Narbono Begay has been personally impacted by the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Movement. Many of his friends and loved ones have gone missing or been murdered.

In an interview with the *Sun*, he said he hopes his paintings bring the issue into the light.

“I just want people (mainly females) to know about it. To make this more known, because there are too many females out there who don’t know this is real, and they’re just walking around thinking that everything is okay,” Begay said. “I’m not trying to scare people; I just want people

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to know more.”

A lot of Begay's paintings depict people being silenced in some way, and he said that's a major issue when it comes to the situation Indigenous people are facing. He said the media often stays silent when an Indigenous person is missing or has been murdered.

“It's not supposed to be known about,” Begay said.

ALCOHOLISM IN THE COMMUNITY

Joshua Whitman has also been personally affected by his chosen topic of alcoholism. Whitman said that alcoholism runs in his family, and it's also something he sees in his job at the Octavia Fellin Public Library.

“And as far as the community goes, I feel that it's very prevalent, especially now with the whole pandemic going on. Before the pandemic, we would look at individuals coming into the library intoxicated on a daily basis. Some of these individuals are regulars, so they would come in intoxicated every single day,” Whitman said. “Occasionally they would be trouble and we would have to call security or the police.”

Whitman said that alcoholism is something that the people of Gallup have just become so used to now that they've become numb to the problem.

“I travel to the eastside of Gallup on my way home, and sometimes in the afternoons I see these people just walking, sitting around, just minding their business, but also drinking as well. I feel like as a community we've become so desensitized to seeing this sort of stuff that we don't address it,” Whitman said.

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Whitman's piece for the BeCause show is a mixed media display featuring oil paint, beer bottle caps, and cotton string. The piece is 7x4, and Whitman said it's the biggest piece of artwork he's ever created.

He said the message behind the painting is that people often don't know the problems others are facing that may be leading them to drink.

"I guess the message I'm trying to look for is 'yes, we've become desensitized to people drinking, but we're not truly aware of the problems that they face; whether it's generational, whether it's familial.' Everyone is having their own struggles, and although this is not a healthy way to deal with it, this is something that they're doing to try and get through their past trauma," Whitman said.

The 'BeCause' art show will be on display until Oct. 1.

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