

# OUT OF NECESSITY COMES ART



Artists are drawn to their craft for many reasons. For Dallas-based artist Desmond Blair, a life in art today can be traced back to the need to solve a challenging problem early in life.

“It literally came out of us trying to solve a problem, me being able to write so I could start school,” he said.

Blair was born without hands, but found he had two other important things – a family determined not to let him find excuses but solutions, and a personal drive to overcome any challenge.

Blair inspires every time he puts brush to canvas, reminding himself and anyone that anything is possible.

“I’ve always seen my art as a way to encourage people to challenge themselves, and not just people with limb differences, but I feel like that was my challenge for myself,” he said. “I see each piece that I do is a challenge, so I learn something new from each painting I do and when I meet people if they see my art, my hope is that encourages them to get out and try something they may not be comfortable with.”

Difference is the term he chooses over disability because he believes no matter the circumstance, people have a choice.

“I’ve never thought of myself as being disabled because to me disability is always a choice,” Blair said. “The moment you quit or decide you can’t do something, for me, that was always the moment I would be disabling myself.”

Having that background and determination, even in learning basic things many take for granted, gave Blair a different perspective on what can and can’t be accomplished.

“I didn’t really understand it until I got to college, but that was the awakening because I would meet people and they’d say ‘I can’t do this,’ and I’d say ‘Well, you didn’t try,’” he said. “Even today I look for ways to push and challenge myself because I am constantly learning something. That is the thing that’s become the biggest part of me because of my limb difference.”

One of 40 gallery artists featured in the May 18 Whimsy & Wonder festival in downtown Liberty Hill, Blair will have his work on display and will be painting on site and meeting visitors.

“I’m looking forward to it and I’m excited,” he said. “I’m looking forward to taking the show on the road. I’m hoping I thrill people and we make it fun and have a good time and am able to encourage people.”

The pieces he will have on display in Liberty Hill will be primarily portraits of musical artists from the 90s era. He enjoys doing portraits because it poses the challenge of creating emotion in those captured.

“When you do that or look at people like that, you get to see what their story is, you get to learn from it,” he said. “You have an instant to capture somebody and it is almost like a photograph, but with the paint you have the opportunity to tell the story through your brush strokes and technique. You have the opportunity to create this snapshot of somebody and kind of tell a story about their spirit.”

In his journey to becoming the artist he is today; Blair credits his mother with reinforcing the need to try and work at things and be a problem solver.

Learning to do basic things was always a challenge for Blair as he overcame one obstacle after another but learning to write was the critical skill he needed to master to go to school. His family was not going to let that hurdle stop him and turned to art to help solve the problem.

“I was an accident,” he said of how art took hold for him. “I was learning how to write so I could start school and in order to do that my grandma came up with this idea for me to do coloring books. The summer before I was ready to start school that was the challenge and my grandma said, ‘If he can learn how to color, he should be able to write.’”

Trying every way imaginable to color, he ultimately learned to use his arms and his family insisted he complete a coloring book front to back every day.

“Over that summer because I built the dexterity to be able to color with no mistakes, I was able to do my letters,” he said. “Like any kid I was really interested in comic books and animation, and I wanted to learn about them. I started tracing the pictures in all of them, then one day I drew Bugs Bunny and my mom thought I traced him, so I drew him again and after that she just started giving me different things to draw.”

From there, Blair went from coloring books to sketch books and later he discovered a familiar art inspiration.

“In middle school I discovered Bob Ross and I’d turn the dining room chairs into easels. I kind of got in trouble for that because I’d get paint all over them,” he said. “I’d rip the boxes up in the garage and use them for canvases. I was trying to learn what (Ross) teaches because he tries to teach you a painting in 30 minutes.”

Inspirations for his art today range from those early years watching Ross, to today’s Dallas-area artists including Jeremy Biggers, and on to classical artists like Salvador Dali.

“To this day I still love comic book artists,” Blair said. “Even today my favorite artist is Joe Madureira and he started working for Marvel when he was 17 years old. Others include Bill Watterson who created Calvin and Hobbes and Charles Schultz, which came from my grandma.”

Through art and meeting people, Blair hopes he inspires and helps them understand how important it is to see people for who they are and not focus on differences.

“I don’t have hands, and you have to deal with that when you walk in a room for the first time or you meet new people for the first time, but my hope has always been eventually things get to a point where you may see somebody with a difference, but you see the person,” he said. “If there is anything I can spread, it is encouraging that. I don’t think that just applies to people with disabilities, but in general.” [\*\*The Liberty Hill Independent\*\*](#)