

The art of then and now

Whitlock show is testament to drive and creativity.

Sunday News

Jun 27, 2010 00:12 EST

Lancaster

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Media Center



A self-portrait in oil by artist Jonathan Whitlock.

Adversity can deal creativity a setback, but seldom stifles it. The art of Jonathan Whitlock is a declaration of that.

The 29-year-old Lancaster artist will mark his 30th birthday July 2, when his works take a bow at Red Raven Art Company, hallmarking Whitlock as the gallery's Emerging Artist for July. "How great is that?" he said of the timing.

"It's a dream come true since day one," Whitlock said of having his own exhibit.

"Day one" started when he began drawing in second grade, and by age 15 he knew art was going to be his calling. He taught himself to paint with oils and to sketch; highly influenced by the art form of cubism, he became a studio-arts major at Southern Virginia College. After a year there, he enjoyed seeing his first showing at a local gallery in Lexington, Va.

June 1999 changed everything.

Driving on Route 222 on a rainy night, he sideswiped a utility pole and sustained a brain injury, which put him in a five-month coma. When he emerged from that state, "I had no dexterity at all," Whitlock said. His injury impaired his muscle control and balance, weakened his left side, affected his depth perception and made it necessary for Whitlock to use a wheelchair. Formerly left-handed, "I had to train myself to be right-handed," he said.

It wasn't going to stop him. It took another five months, but he picked up a paintbrush to return to his favorite medium, oil. At his home, an early work from his post-accident period symbolizes his efforts to focus; a face is seen trying to emerge from a sea of squiggles. Whitlock persevered, taking an art class at a community college in Bucks County while he lived and recovered at Success, a Quakertown rehabilitation facility, for two years.

Returning to Lancaster, he continued to pursue art lessons at Acadia, another rehabilitation organization. From there, it was on to Lancaster County Art Association, which reawakened Whitlock's love of cartooning, doodling and sketching.

Today, he's involved with the association's art classes and the Adult Enrichment Program at United Disabilities Services.

"I painted, I painted and painted some more," he said of his road to Red Raven.

Those paintings reflect that journey.

The Red Raven exhibit "is going to show that emergence," said Whitlock's mother, Annette, a program aide at the Adult Enrichment Program. It will spotlight works done by Whitlock before and after his accident and showcase his varied styles and inspirations. At home, some of his art display nods to Picasso and Mondrian; others are very much personal, including a self-portrait that hangs just outside his bedroom. It was begun in 1999, and was halfway done before the car crash. He completed it this year, bridging the gap between then and now.

As for the future, "I want to paint," Whitlock said simply. "Ideally, I would like to make a full-time career of this." He's guided by a mantra that takes its title from a classic song.

"Que sera, sera," he said, which translates to "What will be, will be."

Still, there's more to it than fate. Art, Whitlock said, is more of what a person does create "than what he's able to create."

Jonathan Whitlock's art will be on display through July 31 at Red Raven Art Company, 138 N. Prince St. Call 299-4400 or visit redravenartcompany.com.

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