



Christopher Barnhart, the artist who created the Art of the Box traffic control box mural on the corner of East College Avenue and Adams Street downtown, talks about his inspiration for the piece titled "Infinite Possibilities" after it was revealed Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020. TORI LYNN SCHNEIDER/TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT

ARTIST BLOSSOMS

Family bonding sparks positive energy for Christopher Barnhart

Amanda Sieradzki
Council on Culture & Arts

Artist Christopher Barnhart of Razor Artwork learned the joy of experimentation from his father and fellow artist, Cornelius.

"A mistake is just an opportunity to learn something," says Barnhart.

Together, the duo has pushed the boundaries of the empty canvas. They'll bounce ideas off of one another and try out new techniques. They even coined one called "the shake." They drip liquid acrylic paints onto a clean surface and shake it to see where the paint flows.

It was through this process that Barnhart created "Infinite Possibilities," which was chosen for Knight Creative Communities Institute's Art of the Box program.

"That piece was from the first session we



Christopher Barnhart's "Infinite Possibilities" demonstrates his talent in mixed media artwork. KCCI

If you go

What: "Infinite Possibilities" Art of the Box

Where: Corner of East College Ave and Adams St downtown

Cost: Free

Contact: For more art by Christopher Barnhart, please visit www.razorartwork.com. For more about KCCI's Art of the Box project, visit kcci-tallahassee.com/project/art-of-the-box/.

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Christopher Barnhart
Artist

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Christopher Barnhart, whose piece titled "Infinite Possibilities" is on the traffic control box at the corner of East College Avenue and Adams Street downtown poses for a photo with his family after the box was revealed Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020. TORI LYNN SCHNEIDER/TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT, TORI LYNN SCHNEIDER/TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT

Barnhart

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did together," explains Barnhart. "I must have looked at the canvas for a week before applying the first level of color. I kept rotating it on the wall to see what I saw in each direction. One night I started in the corner and never looked back."

Barnhart used etchings, block prints, linocut and stamps to create a multi-layered and three-dimensional effect. From some angles the colorful patterns resemble fabric. An even close look might reveal figures or faces. Barnhart says he sees unity in the piece and is proud to have it shared with the public.

For years, Barnhart considered himself a "shy" artist but now feels like the time has come for him to "blossom" out of his box.

Barnhart grew up in Monticello. He attended Florida A&M University, and it was during his time in college that he picked up a scratchboard for the first time. The black inked surface can be etched into and rubbed away using different tools. Barnhart loved the ability to scrape and shape with an acute attention to detail.

"Initially I used regular scraping blades, but one day I was on a train in Atlanta and had the material but nothing to carve it with," recalls Barnhart. "It was right after Florence Johnson had passed, and I wanted to create something for her. I used a regular stick pen and etched out a piece that I call 'The Infinite Run' that I dedicated to her."

Once Barnhart discovered how much more detail he could pack into a piece with a finer tip, he branched out to find other tools. He experimented with different grits of sandpaper, fiberglass, broken plastic and wood. Eventually, he realized a razor blade made the finest cuts, and so his moniker Razor Artwork was born.

On his Instagram account of the same name, Barnhart uses the video time-lapse feature to give viewers insight into his process. Since the start of the pandemic, he has participated in a few virtual events and created his website to share his art with a broader audience.

Each piece contributes to his vibrant diasporic showcase, spanning African, Indian, Caribbean and other international influences. He has captured the overlapping stripes of a Zebra herd and immortalized dynamic figures from African and African American history.

He considers M.C. Escher to be his greatest influence when it comes to using a black and white color palette. Since "Infinite Possibilities," however, Barnhart has had the wide world of color opened up to him.

"Now I'm in a whole different playing field where color is a new challenge," says Barnhart. "I'm finding what works and what doesn't. It's always an adventure and one of my favorite things to do. To come up with a concept in my head and watch it come to fruition from nothing never gets boring to me."

Barnhart recently tackled a piece which he considers to be his greatest undertaking thus far. "Humanity," is comprised of hundreds of words, patterns, and detailed images that make up a larger face and background fabric. Barnhart says the piece took six months to complete.

An avid reader, he would visit the library to research



Christopher Barnhart uses an etching technique.

PROVIDED BY CHRISTOPHER BARNHART

different African tribal markings and textiles. Barnhart grabbed books at random and inserted positive words into the piece like honor, respect, love and peace. A poem at the center of the subject's forehead states, "there are many secrets hidden within the bowels of my face," and implores the viewer to look closer and peer into infinity—a common theme in Barnhart's recent works.

"I [enlarged] the piece and put it on my dad's wall without telling him and gave him a month to respond," says Barnhart, who values his father's artistic point of view. "I went over after a month and asked him what he thought. He said he loved it, but then I went and got his glasses. I've never seen my dad break down and cry. He couldn't believe he'd had the piece on the wall without seeing the detail. That was an impactful moment for me. I felt like that was a successful project."

Art continues to be a family affair and bonding experience for Barnhart. As the world marks almost a year into the pandemic and the strain it has put on schools and art programs, he is amazed by his son's and daughter's growing talents and developing "artsmanship."

Barnhart will sit with his daughter for hours as they create in tandem on canvas. He loves watching his son be inspired by nature and brings him to new outdoor parks to draw lakes and trees. He hopes to pass along the same creative curiosity he shares with his children to the greater Tallahassee community.

"I try to put a lot of love in my pieces so no matter who sees it they feel a positive energy," says Barnhart. "I want to instill questions and spark conversations."

Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org).