



Heart of Brevard Artist Spotlight Series

Finding Art in the Ordinary with Billy Smith: Artist in the Heart of Brevard

By John Harris

Inspiration can come from many places. Maybe it's found in the leaves changing during the fall, the multi-cultural background you hold dear, or even from a red caped hero brought to life with mere pencils. For local artist Billy Smith, his artistic expression is from all of the above... and then some. Hidden alongside an alley within the Heart of Brevard, you may have already encountered one of Smith's many murals, one of a fuzzy white squirrel mascot painted larger than life. Like the squirrel, Billy is anything but ordinary.



Smith's journey as an artist began as a child walking through the woods of Brevard, appreciating the richness of its many colors and seeing the beauty in the ordinary. Smith remembered, "I found a rotten apple one time and told my Mom 'It looks like E.T.!' Today, he still sees the world through similar eyes. He shared, "I look at landscapes and the human body in almost exactly the same way. They have the same body lines to me." Currently, Smith has directed his artistic focus on the human figure explaining, "I just feel like the image of God is in everyone, and I can paint that and show the essence of each person."

Even with his appreciation of colors at a young age, it wasn't until later in his career that he would include them in his art. For years he chose to avoid its usage and instead went with graphite as his creative tool of expression. Smith explained, "The inner critic in me would say, 'I don't think you can do this correctly'... But once I got over that hurdle it was like, 'this is what you were made to do.'" He now creates with oils, which has become one of his favorite mediums.



A message that each one of his pieces shares is authenticity. Smith elaborated, "I'm a big stickler on being authentic... Every time someone sees my work, I want them to feel something authentic about it." This same "authenticity" reflects in many of his themed pieces as Smith discussed, "Most of the time it's coming from my heritage. I do a lot of African work as well as some Native American pieces."

Smith's influences span from the art of the Renaissance period, including the work of Raphael, to the comic book creations from artists like Todd McFarlane (creator of *Spawn*). The work of Robert Henri, an American painter and writer of the book "The Art Spirit", has also had a creative impact. Smith remarks, "He really inspired me, not mostly because of his work but because of the way he critiqued and taught. That's been my model for the way that I teach."

Smith's path as an artist hasn't always been an easy one, but he has endured through challenging times. He reflected, "I'd always been told 'you can't be an artist' and 'you shouldn't try to be an artist'.... When somebody crushes who you are at the core, that is very depressing." Smith recalled, "Art was at the forefront of this town reinventing itself, and I was there for it. It was amazing. What I knew I wanted to do was what would revive and bring life back to the area. So I love this place because of that."

Smith is a self-described "super native" of Brevard. In his role as the VP of the Transylvania Community Arts Council, in addition to his responsibilities as an art instructor and filmographer, it's safe to say Billy wears many hats. You will also find him in his art studio located within the Heart of Brevard business "With Regards".

Smith has not limited himself to studio work but continues to showcase his art on the walls of downtown Brevard. Billy's newest mural project will soon be completed and will be revealed in conjunction with Heart of Brevard's event Arts in March, scheduled March 27-28th. Come join the celebration! If you would like to learn more about Billy Smith and his work you can explore this website through this link: <https://lucky7btk.wixsite.com/new-art-domain>

Smith's story as well as other local artists' spotlights will be showcased in the Heart of Brevard's e-Newsletter, social media and in an online gallery. The gallery includes each artist's interview, video and selected works. The gallery can be viewed here, www.brevardnc.org/artistspotlight