



Starting Low — The Art of Painting Shoes

By Ashley Halligan

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Benjamin Smith, a 24-year-old studio art graduate of Marietta College, who recently relocated to the most un-Ben Smith state there is: Wisconsin, (self-described as “one sexy, mother-*&*\$%#@!* badass”) is a man of many (artistic) talents. He labels his primary talents as portrait drawings and paintings, although he also has a few distinct crafts that distinguish him from other artists. One of those unique talents is mural-painting, which can be seen at the Locker Room in Marietta. But perhaps a bit more divergent is Ben’s love of fashion-related art, specifically- painting high heels. And I don’t mean painting high heels on canvas, rather using high heels as the canvas.

Ben’s love of art expanded when a close friend asked him to paint a pair of heels for her — after doing so, word-of-mouth quickly spread and he was being requested to paint heels for a multitude of girls for a diversity of events. Currently Ben fills about five shoe orders per week, designing them specifically for each individual — some for everyday wear, others for more formal events and some for events as exclusive and luxurious as weddings.

“I’m not saying that painting shoes was my idea, but the style and method that I use is my own,” Ben says.

Ben is the first to disclose the idea of shoe painting is not original, but the means by which he does so are truly reflective of his own artistic rites, although equally solicitous to the individual for which he’s designing. Despite his pretense of masculinity, he is clearly sensitive to the importance of fashion and uniqueness to his clients. “Everyone who follows fashion wants something new and original,” he goes on to say.

Ben frequents discount stores like TJ Maxx, Gabriel Brother’s and Burlington Coat Factory to stock up on stylish stilettos that can be used as a foundation for his craft — and at some point purchased by an adoring woman.

Ben’s life dogmas are clearly inspired and cultivated by his love of art and philosophy:

“‘Dreaming permits each and every one of us to quietly be insane every night of our lives’ (William Dement). Everyday is a dream for me because I never know what’s going to happen. Everyday is different from the last. Every time I make a piece of artwork, I try to make it different from anything I, myself, or anyone else has ever done before. I believe that anyone can be an artist and the art world itself is way too judgmental. I like

to push the limits and test the waters of those who believe they know what art is. I don't consider myself a rebel or a black sheep — I consider myself an artist and I want to be known and remembered as one. There is no method to my madness; I'm just a man with a vision — I'm also pretty as hell.”

Ben's work, including custom-designed shoes, photography and paintings can be seen at his personal Web site and online portfolio, www.sugarlessart.com. As an extension to the William Dement quote, Ben adds in reference to his site, “Here, these dreams are vivid for everyone to see.”

If interested in ordering a pair of custom, hand-painted shoes, Ben can be contacted directly at sugarlessart@yahoo.com.

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