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An artist unmasked

Former television art director puts hopes, dreams on canvas

By AMANDA LLEWELLYN
VIEW STAFF WRITER

The pageantry of masquerade is often heightened by the mystery of what is hiding beneath a mask, but for North Las Vegas artist Don Michael Jr., it's the masks themselves that tell a story.



gary thompson/viewNorth Las Vegas artist Don Michael Jr. stands in front of a series of his mask-themed paintings currently on display at the Blue Sky Yoga art gallery, 107 E. Charleston Blvd.

A portion of Michael's "Mask" series recently was unveiled during First Friday at Blue Sky Yoga, 107 E. Charleston Blvd., which also doubles as an art gallery.



The series features paintings and mixed-media artwork of masks from around the world.

Michael said he

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gary thompson/view"Hang Up and Drive" is among several paintings by North Las Vegas artist Don Michael Jr. on display at the Blue Sky Yoga art gallery, 170 E. Charleston Blvd.

got the idea to tell stories through painting masks after a relative brought back several masks from the Pacific Islands.

"They're inspiring," he said. "And I think every one tells a story."




gary Thompson/viewTop, a painting inspired by the home foreclosure crisis titled "Loan Modification Request" by North Las Vegas artist Don Michael Jr. is displayed at the Blue Sky Yoga gallery, 107 E. Charleston Blvd., on Feb. 11. Bottom, another Michael painting on display at Blue Sky Yoga, "Destiny," also plays on the theme of humanity cast adrift in an unforgiving world.

Michael, an Emmy award-winning art director at various television stations in the country over the past 20 years, moved to North Las Vegas nearly seven years ago to accept a position with KVBC-TV, Channel 3.

"I have been so busy for such a long time with my work as a graphic artist that I had to put fine art on the back burner," he said. "But I had a few things happen in my life that created some angst I was anxious to get rid of. That led me back to painting."

Michael said one of his favorite pieces is called "Loan Modification Request" and features the hands of a young couple reaching up from a dark, churning sea as a steel tower looms above them and jets fly overhead. A mask with a serpent's eyes and tongue beneath the surface is

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suspended in the air just above them.

"It's a commentary on what is happening in our country right now with people losing their homes. I think people constantly feel like they're being allowed to drown. The tower represents banks, and the jets are the Wall Street bigwigs that fly privately on our dollar. I think it is a really powerful image," Michael said.

Friend Peggy Copeland said she has been impressed with Michael's technical ability, especially after seeing the 4-by-4-inch palette knife paintings the artist recently unveiled.

"The tool he was using is bigger than the canvas, and to get that detailed is just incredible," she said.

Michael said he has enjoyed the challenge of creating such small works of art with a palette knife, which traditionally can be hard to wield when creating small pieces.

"I just wanted to see if I could do it," he said.

Michael was laid off in August, a victim of the sputtering economy, but said he remains optimistic about the future.

"I'm painting now more than I ever have," he said. "I have made a commitment to work on my painting every night, no matter how tired I am. And good things are starting to happen now. Things are looking up."

Michael said his ultimate goal is to have his works displayed worldwide.

"I think that my style, my ideas and the compositions of my work are original enough that that idea is not too far-fetched. I would love for people to be strolling through a museum in Paris and point to a painting and say, 'Now, that's a Don Michael Jr.,' " he said.

To view more of Michael's work, visit www.donmichaeljr.com.

Contact North Las Vegas and Downtown View reporter Amanda Llewellyn at allewellyn@viewnews.com or 380-4535.

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