



THE VALUE OF STREET ART



By Heather Spaulding
Reporter

Like the infamous street artist Banksy, Joe Wright's art turns up in the most unlikely places, primarily around Skid Row, one of the rougher neighborhoods in his hometown of Los Angeles.

"You can tell a lot about a city by what is written on its walls," Wright said.

More recently, Wright's artwork can be found on display at Anne Giovanni's studio, 171 Dougherty Lane, behind the fairgrounds every Thursday and Friday from 2-7 p.m. until July 4. The vibrant colors of his work pop off the walls and come to life in the garden atmosphere.

Wright has been drawn to the arts for as long as he can remember, he said, and his parents always encouraged him.

He draws his inspiration from all over, while focusing on current events and pop culture. Andy Warhol and Jean-Michel Basquiat are two artists that have had the most influence on Wright.

"My color palette is probably most like

Warhol," he said, "but my style is like Basquiat."

Wright has traveled to nearly every state in the United States, and besides the West Coast, his favorite areas were small, deep southern towns.

"They have real character, with an imprint of French colonialism, and there's a 'voodoo' feel to them," he said.

Wright added that he is thankful for the cast of characters he met in those towns in the Deep South.

"I would not have been able to write some of the poems in [my book] '10 West' without talking to them," Wright said.

"10 West" was written after a road trip from Jacksonville Florida to California on Highway 10. Published in 2015, the poems are inspired by the people and places Wright saw along the way.

Wright's more recent self-published book, "The Muse is Real," includes a poem dedicated to Friday Harbor poets, titled "Hey Poetry Lovers in Friday Harbor."

"Poetry gives us consciousness," Wright said, although his favorite art medium is a mix of acrylic and oils, paintings often infused with intriguing items like jewelry and antlers he has found along his travels.

To up-and-coming artists, Wright suggests they simply keep at it. However, if art is a chore, then perhaps a different career path might be a better fit.

"An artist is doing it because they can't put the paintbrush down. It's about being hooked on a feeling," Wright explained, adding that he isn't motivated by money.

In fact, you won't find Wright's work in any gallery. Those, he said, tend to be stuffy and elite. He added that both the East Coast and Seattle lock their art away in galleries where a majority of the public doesn't have the resources to buy or see it.

"An artist who really knows where it's at will take their art to the streets,"

Wright said, explaining that the street is where the art pieces really can be seen, where everyday people can enjoy it, while going about their lives, keeping the work more relevant and kinetic.

He chose to install his work on Skid Row because of its dichotomy: bustling during the day with vendors selling everything from food to flowers, to a despairing zone of drugs, gangs and homelessness.

"It's vibrant by day, but scary at night," Wright says, noting that



Heather Spaulding/Staff photos

Joe Wright and his art.

even though he never goes into Skid Row at night alone, he has still been attacked on multiple occasions while installing art in the area. He doesn't blame his attackers, however, but rather drugs and mental illness.

"They are just out of their mind," he said, adding that if one really wanted to get serious about solving homelessness, they would use a two-pronged approach grappling poverty and addiction.

"Every addict I have talked to doesn't want to get sober," he said, explaining the deep pain caused by poverty.

By placing his art, which often takes shots at authority, in places like Skid Row, Wright said he hopes to open viewers' eyes as well as give back to the world.

"I just want to contribute," he said.

