

THE HEALING POWER OF ART

Ray Goodluck shares his culture and passion through painting

BY BECKY ANTIOCO



Looking at Ray Goodluck's paintings, you may be drawn to the vibrant colors, or to the realism of his portraits. If it were up to Goodluck, however, it would be the imagery, titles, or the energy of his work that draws you to it.

His paintings – mostly portraits and wildlife that tell the stories of his life and culture – are designed to bridge generations. They tell the stories of what he has been through and what he has been told by his family and community.

Growing up in the Navajo Nation, Goodluck was surrounded by art. Three generations of his family were silversmiths; his mother wove rugs and did beadwork. But he took another path, becoming an ironworker, learning from experienced tradesmen in Albuquerque, and eventually moving to New York where he became the first and only Navajo member of New York City's Local 40 union. Ironwork was lucrative, and a few years later, he went to Las Vegas, Nevada, to work on the new Las Vegas Raiders stadium. That's when his life took a turn.

After falling from a ladder and tearing the ligaments in his knee, Goodluck became a wheelchair user. Disheartened, he spent the first month after his injury watching television, frustrated with his situation and his inability to work.

After sensing this frustration, his girlfriend pulled out a canvas and paint set, and Goodluck began painting – a horse, an eagle, a portrait. As he tells it, the first efforts looked like a little kid's artwork.

"I sat at that table for hours, thinking about the challenges that come with painting," he says. "I thought, 'creating art is tough for a reason. If it wasn't, everyone would do it.'"

So, he studied by reading books about artists and color and light. And he began painting with acrylic every day, sometimes for up to 10 hours. He paints whatever crosses his mind and feels that this direct approach imbues his art with honesty and energy that draw people to it.

"It's like flowing water. You just go with it," he says. "Everything I paint is how I feel. The colors I use are chosen without looking at them. I reach in and see what feels right and go with that."

While his accident could have been a tragic turn, Goodluck has a different view.

"Every step you take in your life is a blessing," he says. "Everybody is put in your path to teach you and help spread the message. And some people teach you without saying a word."

Learn more at www.raygoodluck.com.