

Sprayloween brings the spirit of Halloween through the art of spray paint to Gainesville's Graffiti Wall

While cars wooshed past the sidewalk, the smell of spray paint intoxicated the air. Cars lined up Saturday on the sidewalk with their trunks open revealing heaps of spray cans, buckets and rollers. Neon green, orange and purple jump off the sidewalk and draw eyes to the side of the road.

Eric Hornsby filled one out of 42 panels with bright orange pumpkins. Hornsby has been a full-time artist since 2017, that was his first year attending Sprayloween, a loosely planned event bringing over 40 artists from the region to Gainesville's Graffiti Wall to paint Halloween themes on the wall on 34th Street.

"I hope they think the art is dope, I hope, mostly, that it inspires young people to want to be creative," he said.

Tapping into that creativity he hopes to inspire in passersby, he started planning this year's mural; something both bold to stand out and thematic to go with the spirit of Halloween.

He didn't come alone. He spoke with a friend to collaborate on a design to prepare for the big day. After a few hours of trying to match aesthetics, he landed on the pumpkin design.

"He kind of gave me the gist of what I was going to work out, otherwise I probably would've painted something totally different."

He said when he first switched gears to pursue art full time, he hatched a plan to drive to Montreal in search of leaving his life behind and looking for new opportunities.

But when the threat of a hurricane forced him to change course, he turned back toward Atlanta, stopping on the way in Gainesville.

On this spur-of-the-moment trip, he left his mark on the same wall on 34th Street where, years later, his bright orange pumpkins jump off the wall.

“I stopped off in Gainesville and painted an alligator,” Hornsby said, “that’s the first thing I painted on that wall.”

Now, he keeps coming back to Sprayloween because he said it serves as his entry into the world of street art; it’s his passion as an artist.

“This is something that we want to do, that we’re compelled to do.”

Guido Montenegro, the organizer of this event said he grew up hearing about another art event held for Christmas, so after moving to Gainesville, he created Sprayloween.

“When I moved up to Gainesville in about 2010, I went ahead and restarted that tradition.”

He said the event is casual and loosely organized.

“It’s DIY,” Montenegro said.

He said he continues the tradition because artists keep calling him about Sprayloween.

He said he’ll usually put up a post about the event a few months ahead and the floodgates take over from there. There are spots for about 42 artists on the wall, one for each panel, however over the years, like Hornsby, artists have started teaming up.

Montenegro said it can be stressful at times as the organizer, since there is limited space and a big demand from artists.

“There were a lot more than 42 people that reached out to me.”

Montenegro said artists kept rolling in to squeeze into any space that might still be open well into the afternoon.

Montenegro’s event has caught fire over the years.

“It started off as something local,” he said. “When I first moved up here, there was a few street artists, maybe seven in total.”

From there it grew regionally, creating contacts with artists in Jacksonville, and now he has artists show up from as far out as Atlanta.

He also said he tried doing many events just like Sprayloween throughout the year, but Halloween was the holiday that stuck.

“Halloween seems to be a little fun,” he said. “Everyone can tap into things that they’re interested in.”

Montenegro sees the impact the event is making in the community; all the planning and painting is worth it in the end.

He said he’s had families and kids go up to the murals and take pictures and it makes him feel good. He said that’s the spirit of the event.

“If a piece of art can stay there for some time then, it’s something different and beneficial for the community,” he said.

He said he hopes that Sprayloween shows people that art is accessible and open to anyone, whether that be creating art or appreciating it. The wall has a new meaning, it becomes an experience – someone noticing a flash of color from their car window – it leaves a mark that may brighten someone’s day.

“It brings life and joy,” he said. “Amidst all the chaos in the world...you can just take a moment and just appreciate beauty and creativity.”