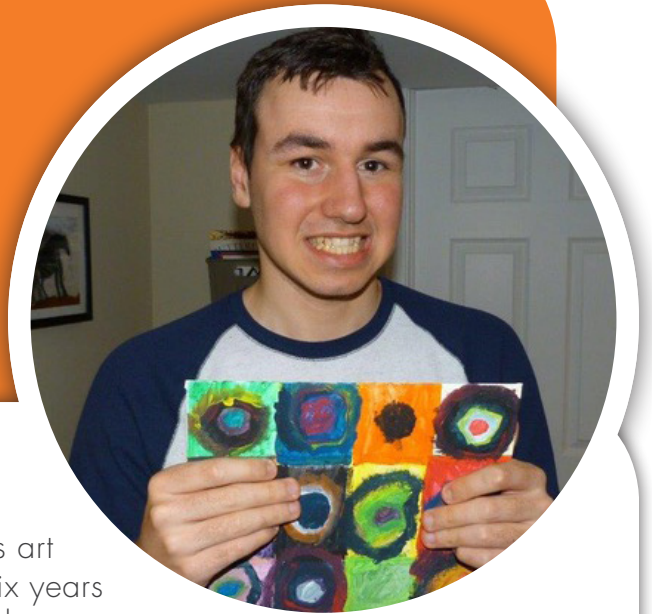


Celebrate COMMUNITY



JOE RATAICZAK

An artist known as "J-4," Joe Rataiczak, has been using his art to express himself, and find his voice, since he was only six years old. Joe began his artistic pursuit by drawing shapes and the scenes that surrounded him. His abilities contained a great deal of precision and emotion, and he began to really express himself through his work.

Once Joe recognized the ability he had and the enjoyment that came from his creations, he began to experiment with different mediums – everything from oil and acrylic paints to buttons and bubbles. He has been able to not only express himself through his work, but also use it as an outlet to breakdown barriers that he has experienced.

Joe lives in a world where non-verbal communication isn't always common and verbal communication is often taken for granted. However, from Joe's perspective, art is a voice that everyone can use and understand.

When Joe was only three years old, he would draw and color on a dry erase board. This had a very calming effect on Joe and he especially enjoyed recreating the Disney logo and writing the titles of Disney movies.

Joe has always loved to draw random letters and numbers. Starting at an early age, he has been mostly non-verbal his whole life and his mother believed the mix of numbers and letters he would draw was his way of communicating. This soothing habit led to his experimentation with other artistic mediums and the discovery of the calming nature through his different art projects.

When Joe was seven, he got a little more expressive with his art skills, specifically painting. He dumped two gallons of blue and pink paint on the basement floor and used his body as his paintbrush. After this, he decided to continue his expression by

dumping smaller amounts of latex paint onto the floor and used his hands this time as his tool. The basement space is now his official art studio.

Joe has been able to turn his passion for art into an outlet to express his emotions and channel his energy. However, while Joe is relaxed when he is painting, that isn't always the case outside of his studio. One Sunday morning at Mass, he became increasingly loud and agitated. His mother, Kim, always carries a small notebook and crayons just in case he needs something to calm him down. Joe took the notebook and crayons and began to draw the stained glass windows of the church.

A little while later, the Northeast Ohio Autism Group, in conjunction with Grand Rivers Cellars, was sponsoring a contest to design a wine bottle label. Kim had remembered the drawing Joe had done in church that Sunday and submitted it to the contest in the fall of 2011.

In the spring of 2012, Joe found out that his drawing of the windows was selected as the winner and his artwork would be featured on Austin's Red Label wine.

Although Joe may not be able to express himself in so many words, he is able to fully express himself through his artwork and share it with others. The passion Joe has to create is inspiring and we hope he always continues to utilize his skills.

