

One of Tucson's most famous artists, Daniel Martin Diaz, talks about his favorite restaurants, hiking spots, and why the art scene in the Old Pueblo packs a lot of punch. **BY LAUREN WISE**

Renowned artist and musician Daniel Martin Diaz has showcased his art all over the world. He's painted altar pieces for churches in Mexico, designed CD covers for rock bands, and been featured in Rolling Stone Magazine and on MTV-2.

But even with his constant exposure to exotic locations, he's insistent about one thing: His hometown of Tucson is the spot that truly captures his heart.

His artistic style is easily recognizable—ancient egg tempera and resin oil, distressed wood, and Latin text that make you feel as though you've been thrust into another place in time. His goal is to capture the complexities of the human spirit, and with such influences as the afterlife, Spanish Colonial art and post-modernism, the result is captivating, and at times controversial.

Sacred Machine Museum & Curiosity Shop is curated by his wife and co-founder of their band Blind Divine, Paula Catherine Valencia; in addition to showing a large collection of his (and their) artwork, it spotlights other artists that lean towards pop surrealism. And the gallery is aptly named, stocked with books, handmade chandeliers, painted skateboards and guitars, a 15-Stop Harmonium from the early 1900s (used in musical performances and at festivals hosted by the gallery year-round) and Blind Divine CDs, which could even be described as “art music,” pulling listeners into a dreamscape filled with haunting, airy piano and vocals.

Two of Diaz's most recognizable artworks include a painted cluster bomb he contributed to “The Boneyard Project” exhibit, which features antique WWII aircraft and bombs and toured the nation after a stint at Pima Air & Space Museum. The other has a permanent home at the historic Hotel Congress; he designed the proscenium arch on the stage at Club Congress—regarded as one of the most unique destination nightspots in the country.

Currently, the Tucson native has some big projects in the works, including public art for the City of Phoenix light rail substations and the Phoenix Sky Harbor Airport terrazzo project.

What projects are you looking forward to for the next year?

I am working on a large public art project in Mesa, Ariz. I was chosen to design the artwork to enhance the Alma School and Main light-rail station for Metro Light Rail. The Mesa community is very excited about this project ... it's epic.

What was behind the process of designing the beloved Club Congress proscenium stage?

We literally had 15 hours between shows to install, paint, rewrite the electrical system, hang curtains, and weld the stage into place. With the help of a crew of good friends, we finished in 13 hours.

What were the challenges with painting the cluster bomb for “The Boneyard Project” exhibit?

The challenge was in the design, and the psychological implications of painting a bomb. We painted it at Sacred Machine, and it was interesting to see people's reactions to it during the process.

Which local restaurants do you indulge in?

We love to cook, but when we do go out we like to sit at the bar at Downtown Kirchen & Cocktails to share a burger and have drinks, Café Poca Cosa for the Plato Poca Cosa, and The Cup Cafe for breakfast and bloody Marys at Sunday brunch.

When not immersed in the gallery, what does your family do for leisure?

We enjoy hiking in Madera Canyon, the Chiricahua Mountains and Cochise Stronghold.

Is there a particular local art store where you shop for materials?

I buy most of my materials locally at Posner's Art Store, Sarnoff Artist Materials, and occasionally online.

How do you think the Tucson art scene has evolved?

Tucson has always had a very unique underground music and art scene. What we try to do at Sacred Machine is showcase local artists' work, letting people know that Tucson is a cool place to be and a unique place to live and create. The art and music that comes out of Tucson is definitely edgier than, let's say, Phoenix.

What's your favorite gallery?

Of course, Sacred Machine is our favorite, but then again we are biased! We love DeGrazia Gallery in the Sun for its natural beauty and cultural vibe, and Etherton Gallery is a favorite for photography.

What do you love most about Tucson?

Tucson has its own flavor. It's a funky place with real people, very unlike the usual stuffy big cities. And Tucsonans are friendly. It has a small-town vibe, and is a great place to live and create, especially for artists.