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Arts

30 Years and Then Some

Arizona artist Douglas Miles Sr. painted legendary artist Allan Houser's Cadillac last week, but that's hardly the whole story

 Expand



"It's a trip," Arizona-based artist Douglas Miles Sr. told SFR of a recent project that found him adding new artistic touches to his personal hero Allan Houser's car. (Alex De Vore)

By Alex De Vore

August 24, 2022 at 12:00 am MDT

Early on, it took Arizona-based artist [Douglas Miles Sr.](#) (San Carlos Apache) time to find the wherewithal to show his work publicly.

Today, Miles is the founder of [Apache Skateboards](#), an intersectional skate brand, fine art business and social justice organization active since 2002; he's a respected multimedia creator and outspoken public figure who bends the constraints of performance and visual arts through heady photography and social media manipulation. The man literally hands out skateboards emblazoned with his art for free to young Native skaters—he conducts photo shoots with them and builds skate parks; he makes films.

Back in the '90s, however, when his family first encouraged him to showcase his illustrations, his design work, his painting, he balked.

"I just didn't have that confidence yet," Miles recently explained, "but they told me to look at a lot of the work out there. They told me if [others] could do it, I could do it."

This isn't to say Miles' family was dogging on artists, rather that they believed Miles had more talent and more to say than he realized. He'd drawn in school, he was interested in the graphic design work of skateboards; he'd attended design classes of his own through Arizona's Mesa Community College. But, he said, when the fine art world continues to foster a perceived high bar of entry—and this is 20-plus years ago, mind you—people start to think they can't do it. What a terrible concept.

Miles, however, can most definitely do it. I've been corresponding with him for years, but until the other day, we'd somehow never met in person. Luckily, he reached out, late night, through Facebook messenger a couple weeks back: "The Allan Houser Family & Estate has requested and commissioned me to paint his 1993 Cadillac Allante convertible," he wrote. "I'll be at his compound next week painting."



The hood of Allan Houser's '93 Cadillac, featuring a portrait created with a hand-cut stencil by artist Douglas Miles Sr. (Alex De Vore)

I couldn't resist, and that is how I came to be at [Haozous Place](#), the sprawling compound, gallery and sculpture garden south of Santa Fe last week, observing Miles as he worked his multimedia magic on the last car Houser reportedly ever drove. It is worth noting, too, that while I was with Miles, Houser's son Bob Haozous, a celebrated artist in his own right, took the time to say hello and tell me a little bit

about his own future plans (hopefully more on that soon). I was starstruck, really, and, I dunno, something felt borderline historic about being there. Miles felt it, too.




“I met Allan only once, and it was kind of by accident,” he said. “I was doing this market in Arizona, and suddenly I look up, and there’s Allan and his wife, checking out the booths and saying hi to everyone. So when he got to me, he looked around at my stuff, and then he asked me, ‘Are you showing in galleries?’ I told him, ‘No, I’m not.’ And he looked at me and just said, ‘You will.’”





There was no way for Houser to know what a massive moment that was for Miles, who had grown up pulling influence from Houser’s many works and media. A series of junior high-level books about Apache warriors like Geronimo and Cochise had hit Miles like a ton of bricks when he was entering teendom; Houser’s sculptural pieces have always pretty much spoken for themselves and to anyone with an interest in figurative art. Cut to today, and Miles is most definitely showing in galleries and

museums, just like Houser said. I cannot stress enough the radical impact of getting kids skateboarding, either. And there he was, painting a Cadillac that belonged to one of his personal heroes. What a trip.

“Can people just come see it when it’s done?” I asked.

“They can just come see it,” Miles replied.

 “So it’s not going to be sold?” I volleyed back.

 “No, it’s not going to be sold,” Miles replied. “People think I don’t like white people
 when I say this, which is not true, but we, Native artists, have allowed white people to
 define our art for us, whether that’s in museums or galleries or even just in public, and
 that includes commerce. Something like this, people can come look at it; Native people; it’s something by us, for us.”


I ask what it’ll look like when he’s finished, and though he doesn’t want to spoil it completely, mentions it’ll feature Apache figures, minimalist colors and graffiti-style lettering across the bottom of the body, spelling out the names of notable Apache warriors. He’ll complete a portrait of Houser on the hood using hand-cut stencil techniques. It will encapsulate the style and ethos of two great artists—one still living, one dead since ‘94, and still no less impactful.


And so we talked of art and culture, of the renewed force in Native film and television, and Miles’ more than 20 years serving the youths of his homeland and beyond. We were even enlisted to help move a pair of weighty Houser sculptures for an open house event that coincided with last weekend’s Indian Market. I watched Miles as he briefly viewed and considered a series of Houser nude sketches in the compound’s gallery space, his eyes lit up in the way they only can when someone doesn’t know someone else has noticed. I’ve seen that look before, too. It’s awe.




“You’re Skating on Native Land,” read one of the Apache Skateboard stickers Miles gave me before I left.

“I don’t think people think about it,” he explained. “If they’re skating here, they’re skating on Native land.”

I told him that generally when we correspond, or even when he just posts something online about his practice, his thought processes, his world view, I tend to stop and think about things a little more deeply.

 “You had a good one recently,” I told him. “Something about new or young artists?”

 “Oh, yeah,” he said. “Be careful how you talk about up-and-coming artists. They might pass you up one day.”

  His own work changes lives, even mine, but still he’s out there making sure to think of who comes next, whom he can bring up with him or hand a skateboard. He looked  me square in the eye and shook my hand firmly just before I hit the road.

Arts



Alex De Vore

Alex has written about the Santa Fe culture scene for over a decade and won awards for doing so. He's pretty tired of Americana and still hopes new punk bands might happen.



Letters to the Editor

Mail letters to PO Box 4910 Santa Fe, NM 87502 or email them to [editor\[at\]sfreporter.com](mailto:editor[at]sfreporter.com). Letters (no more than 200 words) should refer to specific articles in the Reporter. Letters will be edited for space and clarity.

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By Julia Goldberg • August 24, 2022 at 7:01 am MDT

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Takeaway Messages

As we learn to live with COVID-19, we should continue to fight the virus with the tools we have:

- Stay up to date on your vaccinations.
- Get tested at the first sign of symptoms.
- Seek immediate treatment if you have a positive test, symptoms and risk factors.
- Wear a mask where required by business/entity, when you're sick or have been exposed, or when it makes you feel more protected.

Be kind in your discussions with others about learning to live with COVID-19 in your community.

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7 Days



Claytoonz



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Today

Graze Days

Railyard Park

Governor's Mansion Tour

12:00 pm

New Mexico Governor's Mansion

Coffee and Conversation

12:00 pm

35 Degree North

Matt Nestor

4:00 pm

Cowgirl

Hula Hooping Movement and Exploration

5:30 pm

Wise Fool New Mexico


Youth Chess Club

5:30 pm

 Santa Fe Public Library Main Branch

Beginning Fabric with Lisa

5:30 pm

 Wise Fool New Mexico

