

# Foothills artist learns to adapt, creates art with iPad

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Foothills News

A number of disparate events have led local artist Derek Alvarez to where he is today. Over the past few months, he and his wife Monique have formed Derek Alvarez Art and have a number of exciting opportunities ahead of them thanks to an ever-changing marketplace.

It took the hospitalization of their youngest son for Alvarez to analyze where he was going with his art. He and his wife were already self employed, doing website design, but he wanted to put a bigger emphasis on his fine art pursuits.

"It got me reflecting on things, whether I was happy how I was pursuing my art, and I wasn't," Derek said.

He started looking at the landscape and realized that there were new opportunities, especially with the Internet and digital mediums that he barely knew anything about. For a time, he was focused on custom commissioned portraits that capture important moments in women's lives, but he recently started a project that was inspired by their youngest son Sam's near obsession with the family dog. Derek started doing portraits of dogs and the idea came to do a dog portrait calendar.

What sets the idea apart is the 13 dogs they will feature were selected through a contest where people submitted the dogs they wanted to see featured.

They looked to a crowd funding site as a way to preorder the calendar to allow them to prepay for the calendars.

What makes the artwork unique is that he paints everything on his iPad. Although he is able to print the "paintings" on canvas, he can also print a wide variety of items, as well as

manipulate the images to suit a variety of uses.

He began using the iPad out of necessity, but now finds the process fits his lifestyle as a stay-at-home dad. He is able to work while his two sons, ages 18 and 6 months, nap.

More importantly, he does not have to worry about toxic chemicals in the house. He admits there have been times when his home studio did not have the best ventilation and now he does not have to worry about his health or the health of his boys.

"I don't think that was very good for me, breathing in turpentine and mineral spirits," he admitted.

He started using the iPad as his canvas when he and his wife spent a year in Albania. Monique had lived there previously while aiding during the Kosovo crisis in the 1990s, and they decided to spend some time there a few years ago.

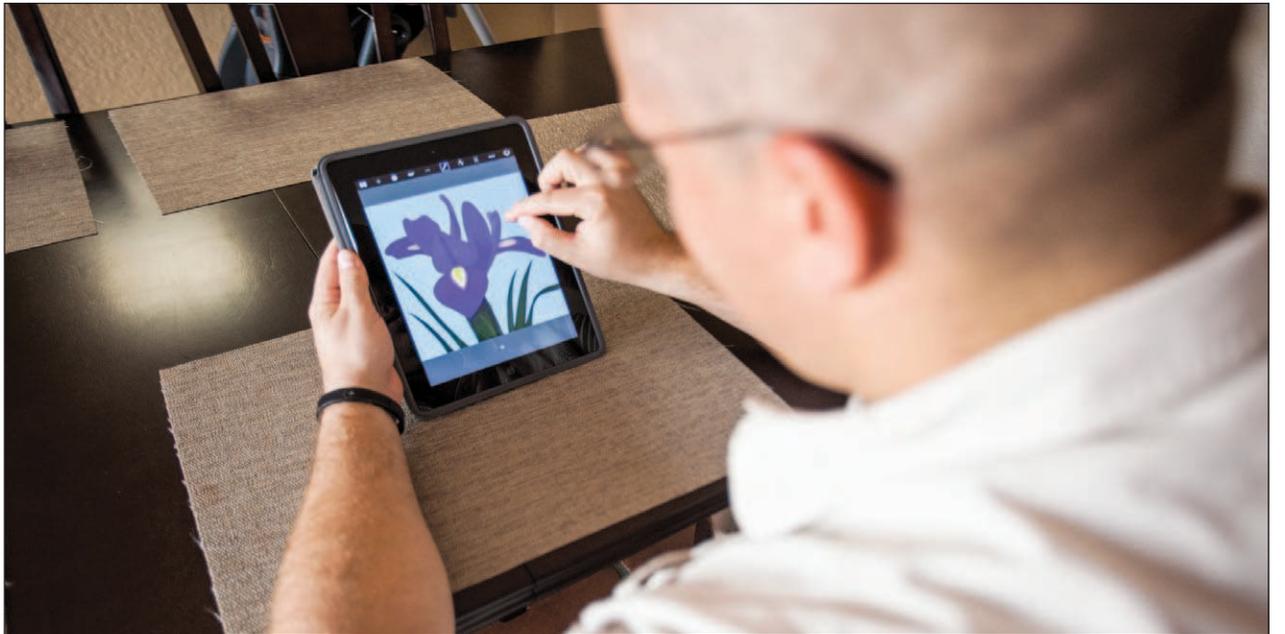
What he did not realize is just how hard it would be to keep up with his art.

"It was really hard to get paint supplies," Derek admitted. "It became a real challenge. They don't even have addresses there. It is all word of mouth."

He learned artist David Hockney, an artist he long admired, had started using an iPad and was inspired to give it a try and soon figured out how to do quality work on the device.

"I just started experimenting with it and really started liking it because you can really travel light because you don't have to take all your supplies with you," said Derek. "You can just take it wherever you go. I just ended up really liking using it."

He has a degree in fine arts from the University of Arizona and soon discovered the same techniques he used in oils and acrylics were applicable on a digital canvass. The only difference is there is no drying time,



Derek Alvarez demonstrates his painting technique, using an iPad.

Photos by J.D. Fitzgerald/Foothills News

the ability to delete a brush stroke allows experimentation and the ability to zoom in on an image can lead to greater details.

"I can try things I wouldn't normally try if I painted traditionally," said Derek, who also admits the advantages have meant that working digitally takes just as long as traditional painting. Although clean up and brush care is eliminated, the ability to try new things and add detail have made it a wash.

After trying out a variety of styluses, Alvarez has found he is most comfortable with using his finger. The program allows him to change digital brushes on the screen, but he feels most at home with his finger and the screen.

The calendar is not his only opportunity on the horizon.

While he has found a real niche with dog lovers, something he will not discontinue, he has other things he wants to paint and other outlets to make a living as an artist, some that he

did not even know were available until recently.

"We just knew we had to find outlets and platforms that are good for the artist," said Monique who handles much of the business side of things. "So many things that are out today, galleries and traditional exhibitions for example, are not necessarily good for the artist."

"That is what we have been trying to do, look heavily the business side. He has the talent and has the passion for it, but if that is not coupled with the business side then he is limited."

They would like to create ways to inform artists about the changing landscape and have discussed both an artists' resource website and possibly speaking to art classes as they further navigate the new horizon's for artists.

"The world needs more artists, more writers, more bakers, more gardeners and we need to show them how to do it," said Monique.

He is still doing exhibitions of his work, though when he



Derek Alvarez stands proudly next to his iPad painting that was printed on canvas.

can he is trying to forgo the traditional gallery exhibits. They recently held one at Tucson Coffee Roasters, where people were able to come talk to Derek, and the family, as well as enjoy the coffee shop.

He will have his art features on Beyond The Rack, a private shopping club that generates over 10 million visitors a month.

He has also begun looking into licensing his artwork to businesses.

One advantage of using a digital medium is he can ma-

nipulate an image to fit a business' or patron's needs. While working digitally means he does not have one finished canvass he could sell for \$10,000 it does mean he has an image he can sell in a myriad of ways 10,000 times.

"We are finding that there are so many more ways to do art than most people think about, including us before we started researching it," said Derek.

And best of all he gets to do it at home, while watching his boys grow up.

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