

Visually impaired artist uses his art to communicate how he sees the world

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DAYTONA BEACH -- DAYTONA BEACH - When Winfield Sainpreux took **the** train from Fort Lauderdale to his new home at **the** Conklin **Center for the** Blind, he was forced to leave his art supplies behind.

But it didn't take long before he found his way to **the** craft closet at **the** nonprofit that trains **the** blind to live independently. His artistic endeavors also caught **the** eye of Conklin **Center** vocational instructor Karen Brandenburg, who then brought him canvasses and paints to create with.

With his limited vision deteriorating and inability to hear, art has become more than a form of self-expression **for the** 25-year-old. It's a way to communicate how he sees **the** world around him.

Sainpreux was born deaf, but it wasn't until he was 12 years old that his eyesight started to decline, getting so bad that he couldn't see a basketball coming toward him when he played a pickup game with his friends.

It was then that doctors diagnosed him with Usher Syndrome, which in addition to deafness causes **the** progressive degeneration of retinas. Over **the** past few years Sainpreux's eyesight has declined so severely that it resembles a tunnel closing in. He can't see in **the** dark and paints by bringing **the** canvas close to his face under bright light. He is currently learning Braille and how to walk with a cane to prepare **for** further loss of sight.

"I'm going to keep painting **for** as long as I can still see," Sainpreux said recently through an interpreter.

Sainpreux discovered his knack **for** art while attending **the** Helen Keller School in New York. He took a few art classes and was mentored by professional artist,

After working in **the** packaging department **for** Sears **for** five years, Sainpreux's sight made it difficult to work. He is now undergoing vocational training at **the** Conklin **Center** so that he can learn to live independently.

Funded by **the** Florida Lions Club and **the** Florida Department of Blind Services, **the** Conklin **Center** on White Street provides daily living skills and vocational training to those who are blind and suffer from an additional disability. Since arriving at **the** Conklin **Center** in June, Sainpreux has painted several portraits of famous figures such as Whitney Houston, Michael Jackson and Bob Marley. He finds photographs of **the** celebrities online and then spends several hours drawing identical portraits and painting them. **The** work is tedious because Sainpreux can only see limited amounts of his canvas.

On a recent afternoon, Sainpreux seamlessly moved his piece of charcoal, as he looked a picture of boxer Muhammad Ali. By shading in **the** dark areas and using a cloth to lighten up his features, Sainpreux completed an identical drawing of **the** boxer within minutes.

His work caught **the** attention of Barbara Wolfson, director of Very Special Arts Volusia. **The** nonprofit organization showcases **the** work of local artists with physical challenges and illnesses. His portrait of a young Michael Jackson is currently on display at VSA's ongoing exhibit at **the** Ormond Beach Performing Arts **Center**. "He is very talented, given **the** fact that he has been

born with these challenges and visual impairments and is able to create art in **the** manor he does is absolutely amazing," she said. "He has succeeded and surpassed what most sighted and hearing people can do."

With limited supplies, Sainpreux often uses found objects to create murals and cardboard boxes as canvasses. He recently pieced together several 8-by-11 inch pieces of construction paper **for** a larger than life portrait of Miami Heat basketball star LeBron James.

Sainpreux said he would like to use his skills as an artist to earn money and gain independence. "He has showed determination in every task he has been given since he got here," said Conklin **Center** Orientation Mobility Instructor David Buhl. "His goal is to be able to work in our city and be able to live on his own."

Cutline: Winfield Sainpreux displays a multimedia portrait of Whitney Houston on Aug. 23 at **the** Conklin **Center for the** Blind in Daytona Beach. Sainpreuz, who has limited vision and is deaf, uses his art as a way to communicate how he sees **the** world around him.

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