Grant Manier, who is diagnosed with Autism, creates Eco-Art from thousands of pieces of colored paper

"Grant is an outstanding young man with a gentle soul. His incredible and imaginative art is a gift from God."

–Dan Patrick, District 7 Senator

4,000 Pieces

Autistic teen, Grant Manier, transforms scrap paper into stunning works of Eco-Art

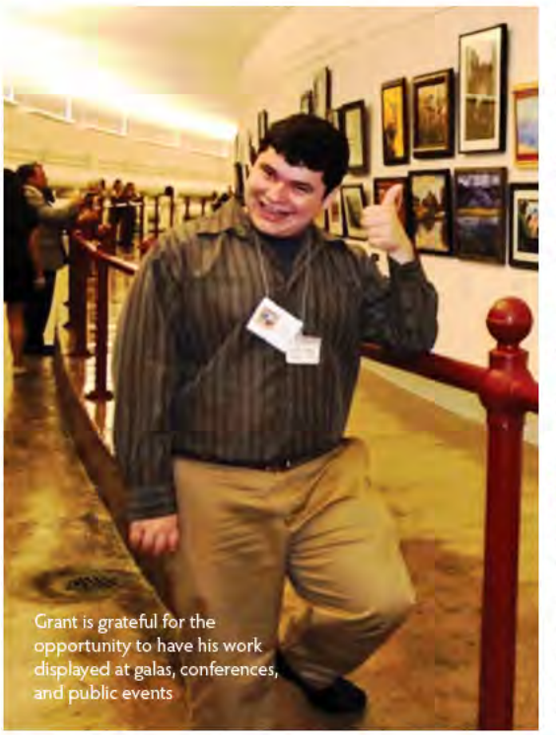
Written by Meagan Clanahan | Select photography by Sara Isola

From magazines to wrapping paper and tissue boxes to puzzle pieces, 18-year-old Grant Manier sees more than just paper. He sees a medium that can be brought to life through hours of work fashioned into amazing collages. He is now one of the country's most exciting emerging artists with state-wide accolades. Even more amazing, he's done it all with a diagnosis that most would consider a disability.

An Early Love of Paper

By the age of 3, Manier (pronounced maun-yay) showed an extreme fascination with shredding paper and creating tiny little drawings. In the same breath, he was also exhibiting signs of extreme anxiety, social challenges, and an obsession with lining up toys in perfectly straight lines.

At 5 years old, he was diagnosed with Asberger's Syndrome, a form of high-functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Struggling academically and bullied by his peers, Manier retreated and used paper shredding as a coping technique. While some of his teachers complained that it was disruptive in the classroom, mom Julie Coy-Manier sought to channel the tearing into positive behavior. Realizing that mainstream schooling was not working for Grant, his mother decided that homeschooling was the next best option. Once at home, Julie encouraged her son to create pictures out of the recycled paper filling up their living room.



Grant is grateful for the opportunity to have his work displayed at galas, conferences, and public events

Shredding with a Purpose

Much to his mom's dismay, he preferred to produce his art in front of a blaring TV. However, she soon discovered that TV was not the nuisance, it was the muse.

"He needed the noise to concentrate," she explains. "He wasn't even really paying attention to it." While she knew that Grant had artistic talents, Julie was floored when she saw the first finished piece of Eco-Art. Entitled "Sun God" and painstakingly shaped out of almost 4,000 pieces of shredded paper - 14-year-old Grant had discovered his passion.

Soon he was spending upwards of 30 hours per week on his "eco-impressionist" pieces. He follows the same method for every painting: tear, glue, shade, glaze, and repeat. "I never know how each one will turn out. I just keep going and see what comes of it," Grant says.

He finds inspiration and ideas from nature, academic subjects, his Native American heritage, and even from his friends. His "coolages," as he refers to them, have brought Grant peace and purpose. "Art is my meditation," he explains. "Sometimes I'll go do something else, but I always come back an hour later to do more."

Discovering Confidence

Seeking a school that would allow Grant to continue to develop his social skills, keep up with his academics, and allow flexibility for his art growth, the Manier's enrolled at Focus Academy in Katy.

"At the beginning when he was starting art shows, he wouldn't even look up," says Focus executive director, Jacquelyn Mulkey. "Now he is able to tell us about his art instead of just doing it. The confidence boost is amazing."

Grant echoes her sentiments. "I can relate to the kids here," he says. "Many of them have the same issues as me - so it works." The other students also look up to him according to Mulkey. "They see Grant having success because of his disability," she articulates. "Not in spite of his disability."

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Creating a Future

Because the class structure at Focus Academy allows him to attend classes three times a week and complete the rest of his coursework at home via computer, Grant is able to take his art to a new level. That includes participating in art shows, leading live demonstrations state-wide, and selling his pieces.

To date, he has sold four original Eco-Art pieces and has generated over $65,000 in sales of reprints, note cards, and calendars. He has also become an Autism advocate and is committed to giving back financially to multiple organizations across Houston. As the demand for his work has grown, he has even commissioned a local organization called Different Abilities to help mass produce and package his products. "Grant is an outstanding young man with a gentle soul. His incredible and imaginative art is a gift from God," says District 7 Senator Dan Patrick.

According to Grant, he's unsure what the future holds for him and prefers to live in the present, but he also feels art will always be in his life. With 85% of ASD adults unemployed, Julie sees it a little differently. She hopes that his art will be an ultimate source of income as he makes his way into adulthood.

"The greatest fear as parents of children with ASD is their future," she states. "Initially, we saw this as an outlet. As people began to impress upon me the skill level Grant was at, I realized it could be his future, too." But regardless of where it may lead, Julie has only one ultimate wish for her son, "I just want him to be happy." **KM**

MEAGAN CLANAHAN is a Katy freelance writer who loves telling the stories of inspirational people in our community.

Grant with his number one fan, his mom Julie

Learn more about Grant's achievements and his pieces at
grantsecoart.com