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## Town Talk.

### Former Pineville artist leaves mark at New York City's Whitney Museum

By Melinda Martinez | July 11, 2019

After a journey nearly 20 years in the making, former Pineville graffiti artist Pat Phillips' work is on display in the Whitney Biennial 2019 at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City.

"My mom thought it would be a good idea if I maybe started painting on canvas," said Phillips in an email. He is in Miami, where he is doing an art residency at Fountainhead Studios.

"So she actually bought me my first few canvases from Big Lots and I started making paintings. That was around 2005."

"His parents always supported his desire to become an artist," said Jeanie Basco, local artist and retired Pineville High School art teacher. Phillips was an art student of Basco's at Pineville High before he graduated in 2006.



"He was the first and only UPM (Urban Paint Master) I ever taught. He won the Art Award for Senior Showcase voted on by the faculty and students."

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Phillips said UPM was a "small graffiti crew" he started in 2000 with friends he had from junior high until high school.

As a Pineville High student, Basco said, Phillips designed the scrapbook cover for the Youth Art Council of America.

He's come a long way since then.

Phillips, 32, is among the 75 artists chosen to participate in the exhibit, which features media of painting, sculpture, installation, film and video, photography, performance and sound. The exhibit runs until Sept. 22.

Artist Pat Phillips, originally from Pineville, La., was commissioned by the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City to paint a mural, "Untitled (Don't Tread On Me)" at the museum. Phillips has paintings that are part of the Whitney Biennial 2019 at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City. Two of those paintings were painted at the River Oaks Arts Center in downtown Alexandria. The exhibit runs until Sept. 22.

"Two of the paintings I have in the Whitney Biennial were actually painted at River Oaks (Arts Center in downtown Alexandria)," said Phillips. The paintings are titled "Mandingo/Don't Tread On Me" and "The Farm."

This is Phillips' first time to exhibit at the Whitney.

"I mean, I think statistically speaking, you have better chances of winning a Grammy than showing in the Whitney Biennial," said Phillips jokingly.

This opportunity came about when Whitney curators Jane Panetta and Rujeko Hockley reached out to Phillips about doing a studio visit at the Joan Mitchell Foundation in New Orleans from which he received a Painters & Sculptors Grant.

Panetta and Hockley had been "visiting artists over the past year in search of the most important and relevant work," According to the Whitney's website.

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"A few months later, they asked if I would be interested in being a part of the 2019 Whitney Biennial," stated Phillips.

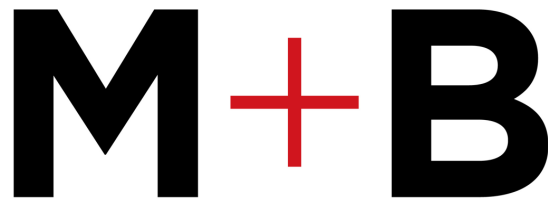
"Jane had seen a project I did in New York at SPRING/BREAK Art Show in 2018."

According to the Whitney Museum of Art's website, "The 2019 Biennial takes the pulse of the contemporary artistic moment."

Introduced in 1932 by the museum's founder, Gretrude Vanderbilt Whitney, the Biennial claims to be "the longest-running exhibition in the country to chart the latest developments in American art."

How does Phillips feel about exhibiting at the Whitney?

"It feels good," Philips said. "I mean, dropping out of school at 22, selling paintings at the Alexandria ArtWalk for \$75, \$100 and working at Popeyes in 2008. I didn't even know what the Whitney Museum of American Art was. Literally 10 years after having my first art show, I'm not only asked to show my paintings there, but they also want me to paint a large mural. Definitely, not what I was expecting."



"The only other museum exhibit I've had has been at the Masur Museum of Art in Monroe," Phillips added. "That was in 2017."

Phillips said his work is in the permanent collections of the Alexandria Museum of Art, The Ogden Museum of Art in New Orleans and the Block Museum of Art at Northwestern State University in Evanston, Illinois.

"I have a few future museum projects in the works and will actually have work on display at the Ogden Museum in the coming months," he said.

"The Farm" by artist Pat Phillips is among those hanging in the Whitney Biennial 2019 at the Whitney Museum of Art in New York City.

Phillips said he attended exhibit openings at River Oaks beginning around 2009. There he met the former River Oaks artistic director Preston Gilchrist who, he said, helped him to navigate the "art world."

"I'd show up to his office almost weekly just to talk about what I was doing and what my plans were. We'd joke around a lot, but it wasn't unlike him to be blunt and straight forward when talking about the realistic truths of being an artist. That was extremely helpful."

Phillips moved to Lafayette for a time but later returned to Alexandria. He was offered studio space at River Oaks by executive director Rachael Dautat and current artistic director Aubrey Bolen while he taught at the center's summer camp.

"The pace can be a bit slower at River Oaks, at least compared to other art residencies or spaces I've worked in, but they really allowed me to do my thing," he stated.

Phillips said he would stay at the center for 3-4 days straight "just painting (spray painting)." He might have broken protocol but Dautat and Bolen were happy he was "cranking out work and utilizing the facility to the fullest."

Phillips was also commissioned to do a mural at the Tamp & Grind Coffee Shop in downtown Alexandria by the late owner Jeff Phillips — no relation.

Amanda Phillips, the wife of Jeff Phillips, said Pat was commissioned to do the mural around 2013 when the coffee shop expanded into its new space.



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A booth was located next to Pat's mural but Amanda moved it to protect the mural. She plans to install a protective covering over it.

Phillips used to hang out at the former House of Java, which is now Tamp & Grind, and the other former House of Java location which was located on Jackson Street Extension

"A lot of kids skate around there and that's pretty much the subculture I come from," stated Phillips. "I started skating around 1998 so I had friends who worked and skated around downtown, so I've been hanging around that area for nearly 20 years."

Lately, Phillips has been doing a lot of traveling.

"I'll be in New York next month, then I'll be back in Massachusetts living there for another seven months," he said. Phillips had moved to Massachusetts last year where he has been working on his New York solo show which opened in February.