



Fall 2022 Poster Artist:

Christopher Spinelli

Being a native Brooklynite, one of the first places I went to with my sketchbook in hand was Coney Island, Brooklyn, NYC. Interestingly enough, that passion for drawing was natural for me since I was that kid who would doodle in the margins of his notebook in the 2nd grade!

To set the stage, Coney Island in the mid-1980's was a relatively dangerous and desolate space. Still, in the desolation of winter, I started drawing the abandoned rides and the abandoned people who populated the sparse magical landscape. On these sketchbook journeys, I also carried my father's 1950's black and white Polaroid camera, which sparked my fascination with photography. I would bring these sketches to Robert Weaver, one of my instructors at the School of Visual Arts. He said, "If you want to see something new, take the same road you took yesterday."

I spent the winter of 1988 trolling the back alleys of Coney Island documenting the scarce people I could find. These charcoal drawings became the backbone for my first solo exhibit, **Sodom by the Sea**.



Fast forward to 2011, I received an email for a position as a weekend art instructor for a REACH program (established in 2002) at Regis High School in Manhattan. The REACH program recruited low-income students of immigrant backgrounds that could assist them in achieving excellence in high school and in life. I applied for that position and in 2011 I began teaching there, dedicating myself 100% to art.

I created a visual arts curriculum that focused on the elements of art with practical, hands-on exercises grounded in exploring different types of art materials. The first requirement of my class was that students carry a sketchbook to document life around them: such as their train rides, and home environment. For the school's annual auction, I was asked to create a painting. This request, and especially the time I spent teaching 50 students at Regis High School, brought me back to actively start painting and I returned to Coney Island. It was there that I remembered a laminated quote from Michelangelo given to me by a friend that states, "Draw Antonio, Draw Antonio, Draw and Do Not Waste Time." And so, I did.

One of the series I started in the late 1980's was of personal altarpieces, which were multimedia creations inspired by altarpieces I had seen in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The original intent was to create art for art's sake, not thinking my altarpieces could possibly convey modern day social issues. But that changed. After teaching and getting back to art, it may me feel the need to transcend with my art, meaning to use it as a voice for social change.

In 2016, following the deaths of 50 gun victims at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida, and after 20 years from the start of my original series, I created my first altarpiece with that new mindset, **The Orlando Altarpiece**. Resembling those of the Renaissance, this altarpiece is covered with gold leaf and "milagros" (Mexican charms that symbolize a prayer, a hope, or a wish). Within the painting, you will find St. Sebastian and rainbows reflected in the landscape signifying the rights of the LGBTQ+ community.

My next altarpiece came to me after seeing the immigration crisis and vilification in the United States. I created **Our Lady of the Wall** with the assistance of Edward Cirminiello, a friend and carpenter. The piece places Our Lady of Guadalupe behind the wall that was being constructed at the Southern Border. Once more, I used the milagros to represent the prayers and hopes of migrant people being held in encampments or blocked behind that wall.



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Another altarpiece honored the memory of **Tamir Rice**. Tamir's smiling portrait peers out of the golden altarpiece from underneath the violent imagery of a noose and two toy guns, similar to the toy gun that cost Tamir his life in an incident in Cleveland, Ohio involving the police. Tamir has since become an icon of the Black Lives Matter Movement.

In 2017, I partnered with Sing for Hope and painted my first piano – of course, adorned with imagery from Coney Island. That piano spent the summer on the iconic boardwalk before finding its permanent home at a local public school. I've continued to partner with Sing for Hope for many other pianos, including one that made the journey to Athens, Greece, where it resides in a refugee camp bringing art and music to people who, along with their basic needs, also need art and music. The imagery I chose for this piano was the heart, painted in a vibrant impasto style. It is by no mistake that the same heart imagery appears again in my Artivism submittal for this year's poster call. My poster will represent **Activism's fall 2022 which begins Sept. 19th, 2022 @ 4:30pm EST.**



My poster design is very simple. It is the imagery of two hearts painted in that vibrant impasto style I picked up long ago after watching Bob Ross paint with a palette knife. I have often returned to simple imagery to convey deep emotions and call attention to social issues. The colors, very much like the palette of colors I used in those paintings of a desolate Coney Island in the 1980's, didn't necessarily represent what I found.

They represented my hopes and the vibrancy of images from my dreams.

I wanted my poster design to be hopeful. Make no mistake, these are pretty dark times. Just about all of the social issues that continue to be with us aren't going away. Most have festered. Lately, it seems as if the political climate in the United States, is bent on returning this country to a time where you could barely whisper some of these issues – like Black Lives Matter, LGBTQ+ rights, Immigration, Equal Rights and so many more.

To summarize, my art career did not go as planned for sure. Never would I have planned a 20-year off-ramp from art. But as I look back, the work I am creating now might not have been possible had I not taken that time to build a life for myself and my family and let that life inform my art.

