

PALM SPRINGS LIFE

Color Riot

Local artist Nicholas Kontaxis creates a visual symphony.

Story by Shana Nys Dambrot



The lively paintings of Nicholas Kontaxis are gaining popularity and acclaim from galleries and collectors around the world — no surprise, given their vibrant, dramatic color and hypnotic gestural rhythm. What is surprising about Kontaxis is just about everything else.

In a sense, Kontaxis, 22, is blessed to have found his calling at such a young age. By all accounts, his affinity for art has been apparent since he was a child, and the studio at his family's Rancho Mirage home is a source of therapy. Kontaxis has lived since infancy with the neurological and physical effects of a brain tumor, a condition causing frequent seizures and limiting his verbal communication abilities.

His mother, Krisann, writes down everything Kontaxis says while he's at work, keeping a running list of dozens of phrases that are later used as evocative, poetic, and sometimes hilarious titles for individual paintings: *Catch Me*, *Sun is Shining*, *Blue Giraffes*, *Delicious*, *Hockey*, *Sandwich Please*, *Hear the Rain*. Kontaxis' most recent commission, *Just. One. More. Time.*, is a 31-foot, four-panel masterpiece whose symphonic dimensions of emerald, ochre, vermillion, indigo, sienna,

and fuchsia now dance across the wall at AC3 Restaurant + Bar at Hotel Paseo, which opened in January.

Kontaxis' parents (a restaurateur and doctor) have been supportive of his art career to a degree most art students might wish for; his aunt, Jenni Pulos of Bravo's *Flipping Out*, has also been an eloquent champion, helping to arrange a smash showing at West Hollywood's De Re Gallery, among other contributions. "My nephew is one of the finest young artists of his generation," Pulos says. "His art is bold, brave, empathetic, joyful, and beyond beautiful. Living with a brain tumor limits his speech, but his voice radiates in his artwork in a way that is electrifying."



Montana Beutler from Heather James Fine Art, whose Palm Desert location will host a Kontaxis pop-up show this month, concurs. “Our interest was piqued by the incredible talent of this

young artist to create meaningful, energizing compositions through color and canvas,” she says: “His work illustrates the power art has to help overcome life’s obstacles. Nicholas’ story is similar to that of numerous other prominent figures throughout art history; van Gogh had temporal-lobe epilepsy, which many believe contributed greatly to his expressionistic use of color, and Matisse became wheelchair-bound after surgery and adapted his abilities to produce his now iconic cut-out series. We are honored and excited to share Nicholas’ work with his hometown.”

Heather James Fine Art hosts Kontaxis on March 17 from 4:30 to 9:30 p.m., with a reception for the artist at 5:30 p.m. A portion of sales will benefit Eisenhower Medical Center.

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