

SPRAY IT OUT

Sonny slacked in the office before quitting to protect animals with bold brush strokes.

BY MOTLABANA MONNAKGOTLA

It was a passion for art. He quit his job after being influenced by international street art. He started small then grew to spraying walls in the city of Johannesburg. Now he travels the world spraying more walls for nature and conservation.

It's a sunny midweek afternoon and FORBES AFRICA is off to meet Sonny in Rosebank, Johannesburg. He is a self-taught artist, painting murals big enough to challenge the animal poachers in Africa.

"I decided to teach myself how to paint; had to start from scratch. Had to learn to mix colors, learn to airbrush with a gun; my main passion was just to make things bigger and better," says Sonny.

Sonny never went to art school. It all began when he started losing interest and slacking at his sales job. He stared digital art and mixing PVA paint at the age of 23. That's when he started getting commissions for indoor murals. It led to his first street mural, using a spray can for the first time, three years ago in Maboneng, the art heart of Johannesburg.

Sonny never looked back to his dreary desk days in sales; he has become an international artist.

What gives him a kick is seeing passers-by – who might have never stepped into an art gallery

– stopping to stare at his work.

A few years after his first painting, it's now his living. He charges between R1,000 (\$75) and R2,000 (\$150) per square meter and some of the murals can be as large as 400 meters squared.

The long-haired and soft-toned 30-year-old's work is influenced by Africa, where he was born and bred. His work focuses on nature and animals, combining realism with fantasy.

"At the moment, I'm busy bringing more abstract elements in my work which hasn't been seen in my paintings yet, but all my new murals will slowly have abstract elements and incorporate people," he says.

Sonny recently completed a body of work for a solo exhibition titled To The Bone.

This work combines wildlife imagery with a social message about the importance of animal conservation; a passion he truly has. He hopes to create international awareness of the fragile state of wildlife in the world.

"I aim to inspire people through the pure beauty of these animals, while reinforcing their importance in shaping our cultural identity."

Sonny has partnered with IFAW (International Fund for Animal Welfare) to raise awareness through the murals and artworks and has a



Photo by Motlabana Monnagotla



Photos by Sonny and Tessa Cunliffe



“WE HAD NO IDEA HOW WE WERE GOING TO MAKE MONEY AT THAT STAGE.



has a campaign to sell artwork online where a portion of the proceeds will be given to this fund. “Anybody that sees the murals and follows the link will see what it’s about, and can give R10 or R20 (\$1.50),” he says. He also has a sponsorship drive, where companies or people can sponsor a wall or part of it. The money will be used to spread graffiti to more parts of the world. The sponsorship will enable him to fly over and paint a wall. He has recently painted in New York and other parts America. He will be moving on to Canada, London and

then Amsterdam. He also has a series of murals for the rest of the world. “I paint in third world countries where they have the animals but struggle to see the importance, but I also paint in first world countries where they have power over the rest of the world to try change legislations to help protect the animals,” he says. African art is been noticed around the world thanks to the likes of young Sonny. Not only is he making an income, but he is making a difference in society by conserving nature with a spray can and walls. **F**

Photos by Sonny and Tessa Cunliffe

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