

Professional Mouth Painters Put the Spotlight on National Disability Employment Awareness Month

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month in the United States. This month recognizes the many and varied contributions of America's workers with disabilities.

In 2015 President Barack Obama said, "We celebrate the ways Americans with disabilities strengthen our workforce, our communities, and our country, and we recommit to cultivating an America where all people are able to build vibrant futures for themselves and for their families."

Twenty-one years ago, aspiring artist Mariam Paré was driving her car and discussing her future with her boyfriend. A shot rang out and Mariam collapsed over the steering wheel, a bullet severing her spinal cord. Her assailant was never found, nor was there any motive for the shooting. Mariam was just in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Rendered a quadriplegic, Mariam spent years in rehabilitation. A talented art student before she was shot, Mariam thought her budding career as a painter was over. Then, one day, holding a pencil in her teeth, she signed her name.

"I realized if I could do that, I could hold a paintbrush the same way," said Mariam, who today lives in a special facility outside Chicago. "I began mouth painting, and over time, re-discovered what I assumed was my lost talent."



MFPA USA Artist Mariam Paré
Pictured above: "Chuck Close" by Mariam Paré

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Fellow American artist Cindi Bernhardt, who became a quadriplegic at the age of 18 when she broke her neck in a fall from a second-floor window, began painting after her accident. While in the hospital, she learned to write using a specially adapted pen between her teeth. Her writing soon progressed to sketching, then to painting. "The therapist noticed I had some talent, so she asked if I would like some after-hours lessons. So I did and it progressed from there."



MFPA USA Artist Cindi Bernhardt
Pictured Above: "Crying Eagle" by Cindi Bernhardt

Today, Cindi's works are featured in private collections throughout the United States, including one owned by William E. Simon, the former president of the U.S.A. Olympic Committee. During the 2002 Winter Olympics, Cindi carried her wheelchair-mounted Olympic torch through the streets of Pasadena, California, as part of the relay team that carried the flame throughout the country to the Salt Lake City Games.

As a special tribute to those who died on 9/11, and the N.Y. emergency services who helped everyone, Cindi painted an emotive image of a red, white and blue American eagle shedding a tear. MFPA created this piece as a tribute to the anniversary of 9/11 in 2002, and inserted it into 730,000 copies of the New York Times.

Determined to be professional painters, both Mariam and Cindi kept painting and were soon producing extraordinary work. They both joined Mouth and Foot Painting Artists (MFPA), an international art movement and commercial cause representing some 800 disabled painters in 78 countries. MFPA artists reproduce their original paintings in the form of Christmas greetings cards, calendars, books and other seasonal items and sell it direct to the public. The proceeds from the sale of this work supports the members of the MFPA.

You can learn more about Mariam and Cindi and all of the many other American artists and help to support their work by purchasing their products from the online shop at www.mfpausa.com. You can also register to receive the MFPA USA free mailing at www.mfpausa.com, the mailings are released in October, so sign up now!