

## **“My Disability is One Part of Who I Am”**

### ***Professional Mouth Painter Puts the Spotlight on National Disability Employment Awareness Month***

Twenty-one years ago, aspiring artist Mariam Pare' 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 thought was my lost talent.”



**Mariam presents Pierce Brosnan with her painting of the actor in his role as James Bond**

Determined to be a professional painter, Mariam kept at it and was soon producing extraordinary work. That's when she learned about Mouth and Foot Painting Artists (MFPA), an international art movement and commercial cause representing some 800 disabled painters in 72 countries. MFPA reproduces and sells the work of its members in the form of greeting cards, calendars, books, and other items.

“My dream was alive,” Mariam said. “Today I am a professional painter, making my living and supporting myself through the MFPA.”

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month, which recognizes the many and varied contributions of America's workers with disabilities.

“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,” noted President Barack Obama in 2015.

You can learn more about Mariam and the MFPA at [mfpausa.com](http://mfpausa.com).