



RENE PORTER IS SLAYING THE CANVAS

BY ETHYLINA CANNE



You never know who you are going to meet in the world and what magic can happen when you do. I was hired to do bingo

at Phoenix Pride in the VIP area of the festival in 2023. It was the first time I had been to Phoenix, other than the airport for a plane change, and I fell in love with the city. There was mid-century architecture, great food, and the festival and LGBTQ+IA community were thriving.

During my bingo, a lovely woman won one of the games, and you can say "the rest is HERstory!" After the bingo, I personally gave her a t-shirt and a friendship was formed. Little did I know that she was an amazing artist, and our friendship has blossomed into something truly special.

I am beyond honored to be her first model for her new series "Slay the Canvas" and I am thrilled that she had time to answer some questions for the readers of GED Magazine.

When did you start painting? Was this creative outlet one that just came naturally or were you professionally trained/schooled?

I've been drawn to art since I was a young child. My dad would sketch cartoon characters and clowns for my youngest brother and I often in the evenings after dinner. We sat around him gazing in amazement as if he created something from nothing. I thought his sketches were magical. I sketched pictures in junior high and high school and began to take more of an interest in my junior year of high school. I knew I wanted to be either a gym teacher or a graphic artist after I graduated college. With encouragement (and guidance) from my mother who was a professional seamstress and my neighbor who was a formally trained artist from the UK, I submitted a portfolio and won a first term scholarship to Columbus College of Art & Design. At CCAD, I built my foundation in fine art, illustration, and design, majoring in illustration with a minor in advertising design. Just as a successful painting needs a strong drawing underneath, my art education at CCAD gave me a solid foundation to build upon throughout my art career.

Regarding this current project, what was

the inspiration for it, and have you always had a love for the art of drag?

I have always had a love of the art of drag. It is one of the highest forms of art—a stunning collaboration of so many incredibly talented artists coming together to create something extraordinarily unique. The glamorous makeup, vibrant and expertly sculpted wigs, extravagant costumes, sky-high heels, and, of course, the sparkly, ornate jewelry—every detail comes together to complete the dazzling and vibrant persona. Drag to me is the epitome of beauty. Nobody does it better than drag artists. Big, bold, and beautiful. I can't think of a more inspiring subject to paint than drag, especially now that I've started this project. All the drag artists I have painted to date have brought so much inspiration and joy to this project already. I can't say enough about them and the wonderful friendships we've built. Priceless.

You have created a new persona for this project. Tell us more about who this person is and why you chose not to paint under your birth name.

My fine art series of drag artists "Slay the Canvas" is a celebration of drag and to truly celebrate these talented drag artists, I decided to blend my visual art with my very own drag expression. My drag persona, Michaela Angelo, is who I will be dressing as for all my gallery showings for this series. Since I am a cis-gender female and my drag persona is female, I would be referred to as a faux queen. I was born on Michaelangelo's birthday, so when researching a drag persona name, it seemed fitting to become Michaela Angelo. Separate from my René Porter website, I have a new website specifically dedicated to this new series under my drag name. You can find it at www.michaelaangelo.com.

How long have you been a fan of drag entertainers and what are your thoughts on the current attack on drag and the LGBTQ+IA community?

I've always been a huge fan of drag performers. While working at The Trevor Project, I got to dive deeper into their incredible history in the LGBTQ+IA community. From the underground speak-easy acts of the 1920s to the trailblazers of the gay liberation movement in the

'60s and '70s, drag has always played such a vital role in shaping and fighting for our rights. And no one is more relatable, comical, or entertaining than drag performers.

Of the portraits you have painted so far in the exhibit, what is your favorite thing about doing them?

Great question. I love making these bold beauties seem as though they are staring right back at the viewer and ready to reach out and touch them. Creating such intricate detail invites the viewer in for a more intimate experience than a photo would. I want my paintings to draw people in so they can see the beauty I see, free of judgment, and just take in the pure magic of drag. Painting those big fun wigs is the most challenging part of the painting. Getting the delicate details and exact color/value transitions to make it look like a real wig can take up to a week or more. I think my favorite part of painting these portraits is the face and the eyes. The paintings are life size so I can get a lot of detail on the face. When I am painting the costumes and fabrics, I can't help but think of my mother and her incredible talent for sewing and designing costumes and bridal gowns. She pursued her craft with such passion, right up until the end of her life shortly after my senior year of art school.

What is the end goal of this project and where do you see your body of work being displayed?

Throughout creating this drag artist series, I'd love to have ongoing shows at LGBTQ galleries to share the journey and celebrate the art with the community. My end goal for this series is to have it included in a queer art collection at a respected museum that celebrates and amplifies LGBTQ+IA stories. I want these paintings to highlight the artistry of drag and its cultural significance while helping to bring more queer narratives into major art spaces. It's so important for reputable museums to support and display queer art.

Please take a moment to follow [reneporterfineart](https://www.instagram.com/reneporterfineart) on Instagram where she will be posting the creation and finished portraits of some of your favorite drag artists. Joyfully, Ethyl