

THE BAY CITY Beacon

Art with Heart: Mural Artist Sirron Norris Teaches SF Seniors to Draw

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Sirron Norris' paintings are a staple of San Francisco's mural and street art culture. His signature bright-eyed blue bears and San Francisco-themed imagery add a friendly flair to numerous parts of the city, from underserved corners of the Mission, to neighborhood schools and hospitals. Norris is also the original lead artist of the Fox cartoon *Bob's Burgers*.

Norris' work doesn't stop there. He is currently teaching cartooning classes to San Francisco senior citizens at [On Lok Lifeways](#), an elderly care center.

The classes have proved a meaningful way to energize and spark creativity among the seniors. The classes will culminate in a collaborative mural, featuring Norris' work alongside the drawings from senior participants.

Any hilarious moments with seniors?

I smile the entire time I am here. The interpretations of their drawings are the best. The looks on their faces as they are trying to solve the mystery of what the end image is going to be is great. One participant fell asleep on me once, which made me laugh. That has never happened to me before. He woke up mid-class and finished, but I couldn't help but laugh.



I saw that you have worked with kids a good amount and are offering a drawing summer camp. What are the similarities or differences you are finding between working with these vastly different age groups?

It's very different. When I work with kids, the challenge is trying to get them to sit still and pay attention. This is not the case here. Everyone is so overly interested, that I don't have to focus on trying to engage them because it comes so naturally. It's also different because when we have children draw animals such as a bear or a dragon, these are images they are used to drawing. For seniors, when I have them draw a bear or a dragon, these are images they haven't drawn in a *very very long time*. Working with both communities is very rewarding, but watching the seniors work through the challenge of the unfamiliar is very powerful.

Of all the opportunities that you are approached with, what made you pick this one?

I saw this documentary about a senior with Alzheimer's. The senior put headphones on to listen to music from his childhood and immediately had memories come

flooding back to him. It was a powerful video that reminded me the power that art has to inspire people and that we don't honor that as much as we should. That's the first thing that came to mind when I was approached for this opportunity. I wanted to improve lives with art.

Do you have any new murals in progress?

I just finished two recent ones, both at schools. One was at Longfellow Elementary and one at James Lick Middle School. I have a new one I am starting in July at the San Francisco General Pediatric Emergency Room.



Do you find that people generally know you from the murals you've done or from your work with *Bob's Burgers*?

Definitely my murals. You only know me from *Bob's Burgers* if you watch the credits roll by, but since I'm a San Francisco-based artist, the blue bears around the city is what I am known for.

Any idea when the mural with the seniors is expected to be completed?

It will probably be complete around September. We want to incorporate their stories and a mixture of the innocence of their work and the quality. I'm excited to see what we come up with together. It has been a very heart-warming experience!