

Local artist

The Story of Allan Eddy

by J. Smith

Atlanta artist Allan Eddy went blind in May of 2000. The diagnosis by five doctors was total blindness for life. With the return of some of his vision and color distinction, Eddy has proved the doctors wrong and has returned to his passion of painting.

Allan Eddy is a 1988 Bachelor of Fine Arts graduate of the Atlanta College of Art. He was the winner of the prestigious 1987 Forward Arts Foundation Scholarship, a full scholarship for the senior year that the faculty awards the most promising junior.

Eddy, an abstract painter, has been compared to Kandinsky, Matta and Miro. Purchasers of his paintings included Elton John and many private and corporate collectors. He showed his art through several galleries, had many shows and a bright career ahead. Then he came down with meningitis in May 2000, spending six weeks at Emory University Hospital fighting this disease. He suffered through numerous tests including more than ten spinal taps and two blood transfusions.

After two days in the hospital, Eddy went totally blind from his bout with meningitis, a disease that normally causes hearing loss when it causes complications. How ironic that with an artist it stole his vision.

The consensus of the doctors, including world-class specialists, was that Eddy would be totally blind for life, or at the most, have very slight light and dark distinction. They said he would definitely be totally color-blind and have optic nerve atrophy, as optic nerves do not regenerate. They told this to Eddy's partner Marc, who demanded the doctors not tell Eddy of the total blindness diagnosis. Eddy was so sick that Marc didn't want him to hear this horrible news. He wanted it to wait until Eddy was stronger.

While severely ill and lying in the hospital bed, Eddy said that if he stayed totally blind he'd have to give up painting and become a sculptor. Marc brought some of Eddy's paintings to the hospital in hopes of finding a connection on another level. If Eddy could possibly see again, Marc wanted the art to be the first thing he saw.

After a few weeks in the hospital, a small portion of Eddy's vision returned. The doctors said this was probably all he would regain. But his vision improved a little more over time. After six weeks the meningitis was under control and subsequently, Eddy left the hospital extremely weak and severely vision impaired.

Eddy's vision kept improving a little bit at a time over the following three years to the surprise of his doctors. He even started to distinguish colors again. He had episodes where he would see sparkles, become nauseous and get a headache. Afterwards, he would notice an improvement in his vision.

By Christmas 2001, Eddy had regained his strength, and Marc decided they should take a trip to Europe, a first for both of them. They went to London and Paris. Eddy got a quick crash course in using a white cane from an instructor at The Center For The Visually Impaired. Eddy hadn't wanted to use a cane up until this time, feeling embarrassed and self-conscious. Neither Marc nor Eddy knew what to expect of traveling.

While in Paris Eddy was walking on a sidewalk and saw sparkles. A few blocks later he looked at a big green garbage can and realized he could see the color green again. Most of his vision improvements have been similarly dramatic.

The trip was wonderful. They left the US being fearful of what it would be like traveling with Eddy being vision impaired and using a white cane. What they found instead was the goodness in people. On airplanes, on sidewalks, in museums and everywhere else, people were wonderful to Eddy. From ushering them into Westminster Abbey beyond the crowds to feeling priceless pieces of art in the Louvre, Eddy and Marc experienced mankind in a new light.

Eddy's vision is almost totally gone in one eye, and he can see out of just a very small area in the other. When he draws or paints he cannot see his own fingers. He didn't think that he could ever draw again.

In 2003, Eddy decided he wanted a tattoo of a dragon on his arm and wanted to design it himself. He struggled to draw a dragon, becoming very compulsive about it. He spent more than a month, 12 hours a day and more, drawing page after page, filling up notebook after notebook with hundreds of pages of dragon drawings. He did nothing else. While doing this he retrained his hand-eye coordination and got better with his drawing. He got his tattoo. But he still couldn't see his fingers while drawing.

Eddy had been taking classes at The Center for the Visually Impaired in Atlanta. Marc nudged him into volunteering to help teaching art to kids there. So, during the summer of 2004, he taught a short term-art project to summer camp for visually impaired kids at the Center. Someone from the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta saw the finished art pieces, loved them and put together a show at the Federal Reserve Bank lobby in the Spring of 2005 based on his project.

Eddy can't paint with a brush now because he can't see the brush touch the surface, so he re-trained himself to paint using his hands and fingers having gotten his start with the dragon tattoo.

Now, in 2005, five years after losing his vision, Eddy is still severely vision impaired and there have been no more improvements in his vision for the last two years. But he has regained enough vision and color distinction to paint passionately.

It's taken several years for Eddy to become comfortable with his impairment to where he has now become prolific with his art. Recently, he wanted to be back showing in galleries when he went to look at Mason-Murer Gallery, the largest art gallery in Atlanta. He happened to meet the owner who remembered his work from a previous gallery several years ago, loved his work and immediately welcomed him into the gallery. The show of Eddy's new art opened there on November 18, 2005, and runs through December 31st. Eddy is also planning to be in galleries in New York, Los Angeles and other locations across the US soon.

A New Vision



"He now feels like he's an artist again," says Marc. "He's more inspired and is painting with more determination than ever."

Eddy's impairment has forced him to take the next logical step in his artistic development. His palette is much brighter, and his work has even more sculptural elements, reflecting the changes in his vision. Eddy now feels that his work is even better than before his visual impairment. But more importantly, Eddy is an inspiration to us all, not just as an artist, but as a human being. So often, we take things for granted in our lives. It is natural to do so. However, Eddy's ordeal reminds us that life is precious and that the passion for living and doing what we love lies deep within the human spirit.

For more information go to www.AllanEddy.com or contact Marc Sherman at (404) 915-3811.