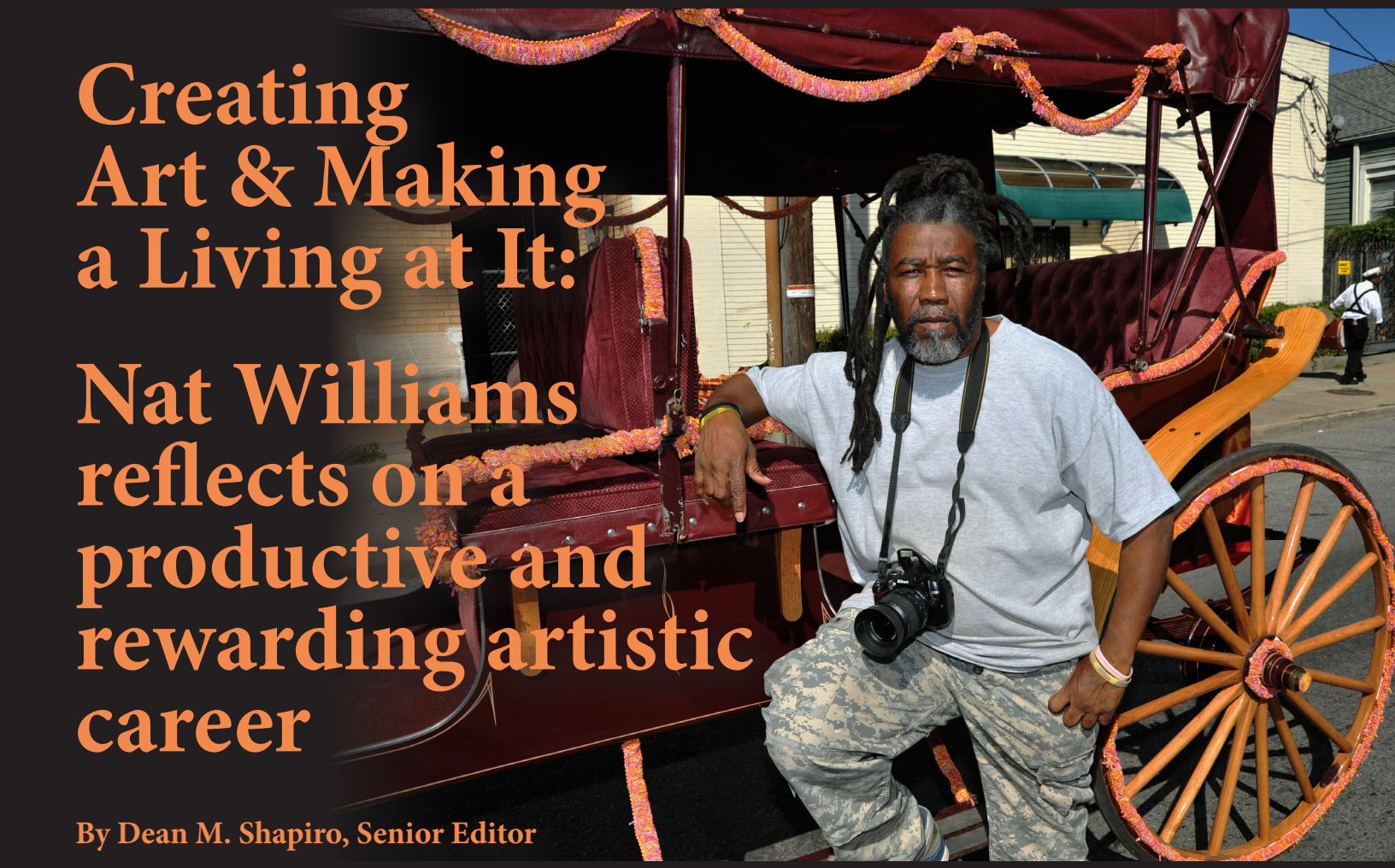
Creating Art & Making a Living at It:

Nat Williams reflects on a productive and rewarding artistic career



By Dean M. Shapiro, Senior Editor

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DWIGHT A. HARRIS

"When you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change."

These are the words of native New Orleanian Nathaniel (Nat) Williams, a multi-award-winning visual artist, photographer, and hairstylist. He knows being a successful artist requires the talent and skills to create art, but he also knows there is more to it than the physical application of those gifts. Inspiration is also a key factor that enables the process that leads to the creation of what can be classified as genuine works of art.

Nat explains that his inspiration is rooted in his faith and his family. As he states, "I'd like to emphasize and acknowledge the fact that it's a God-given gift that I have."

Nat's "God-given gift" has caught the eye of celebrities and elevated his standing in the art world. When Ava Marie DuVernay was producing the "Queen Sugar" series for the Oprah Winfrey Network in northern Louisiana between 2016 and 2022, they featured 27 of Nat's paintings, and DuVernay purchased one of his pieces.

During the shooting of the "Treme" series in the 2010s, two of Nat's pieces were purchased and featured on one of the episodes. He also performed character roles in both film ventures and cut hair for some of the actors. Nat also appeared in the Showtime drama series "Your Honor".

Over the 50-plus years of his artistic career, Nat has displayed his work in what he estimates to be between 650 and 700 art exhibits, many of which were solo shows he arranged himself. As he explained, "If people won't help you, you have to create your own avenues. So, in that process, what I did was create my own avenue."

But Nat doesn't just create art; he also helps other artists find opportunities to share their work. His ability and willingness to connect other artists to markets and buyers for their work has earned him the nickname "The Plug."



"If there is an opportunity to help someone, I'm the type of person who will do that. I do whatever I can to help those in need. I'm obsessed with trying to help people," Nat proudly stated.

He also helps other artists and gallery owners set up art shows throughout the city and the region. The annual Martin Luther King Junior Art Show at the Ashé Cultural Center is coming up for MLK Jr. Day in January. He is helping to curate the event and secure official proclamations from the New Orleans City Council and the Mayor's Office.

Born at Charity Hospital in the early 1950s, Nat's earliest years were spent moving around from place to place, starting with the Treme neighborhood of New Orleans's 6th Ward. From there it was on to the Desire Project in the 9th Ward, and soon after that it was on to a house in the 7th Ward.



Discussing his home environment and how it shaped his upbringing, Nat gives much of the credit to his parents, Nathaniel Butler Williams and Jerryline Landry Williams, and his grandmother on his mother's side, Pauline Riley Landry.

"My father taught me a lot," Nat said. "He showed me, as a kid, how to make money, and it would be to the extent of trying to do things that would help my family. And my grandmother showed us that when someone is in need, it was a gift to give. She showed me that, as a child, you open the door for somebody, whether they were healthy or not. It's called 'manners,' and it's like the old traditional ways of upbringing in our village."

Discussing his creative career, he said, "I became an artist at a very young age. I was around nine, and it was a gift. I have some drawings that I made when I was in elementary school, but it wasn't to the extent of the skills that I have now."

He went on to talk about a childhood friend from a well-off family who he used to hang out with and who was well-dressed. "It encouraged me to draw," he continued. "I would draw clothes, suits, anything I could think of. I wanted to be a clothes designer, so I started drawing designs that I thought I would like."

Fascinated by his newly developed skill, Nat drew further encouragement from those around him who admired his designs and commissioned him to design formal apparel. "Everybody in the neighborhood wanted me to design their tailor-made

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suits, and I would do it," he explained. "I did the designs, and they would take them to Godchaux's or one of the tailor shops to actually have them made."

As he got older, Nat's artistic skill continued to develop, and he began taking inspiration from older, more established artists. One of his role models was the late Ernie Barnes, an African American pro football player who became widely renowned for his painting style that depicted elongated human figures.

"When I saw what he did, I was very impressed by him," Nat said. "His work inspired and encouraged me. I tried to reach out to him and wasn't successful, but he was a role model for me."

In the mid-1970s, Nat enlisted in the Navy and was stationed in Greece at the end of his tour of duty. On his return to New Orleans, he enrolled in art classes at Delgado Community College and learned new techniques and skills that enhanced what he had already acquired.

Later, Nat began exhibiting and selling his work in Jackson Square, displaying his paintings on the fence alongside other artists. He also had some measure of success placing works for sale in French Quarter art galleries, but his efforts to find an established artist to mentor him were unsuccessful.

Determined to get his name out into the art world, Nat began donating some of his works to high-visibility charities. These included the Jerry Lewis Muscular Dystrophy Telethon, the Little Sisters of the Poor, Catholic Charities, the Channel 12 Art Auction and the Lou Rawls Parade of Stars Telethon for the benefit of the United Negro College Fund.

Everything he did to elevate his artistic profile seemed to work in his favor. Nat's work began appearing on magazine front covers, and sales of his paintings began skyrocketing. Favorable reviews were coming in from respected art critics, and comparisons were being made to the style of the late Neo-expressionist artist, Jean-Michel Basquiat. Nat entered the National Arts Competition at the Veterans Administration Hospital in New Orleans and won first place in 2025. The piece of artwork was a remix of the painting by Basquiat, "The Skull", titled Tribute to Jean-Michel Basquiat"

Summing up his life and career to date, Nat had this to say: "In whatever I did and whatever I do, I would try to do it to the best of my ability. I'm a perfectionist at heart. Even though I'm not always perfect at what I do, I go in with that intention. That's what works for me."

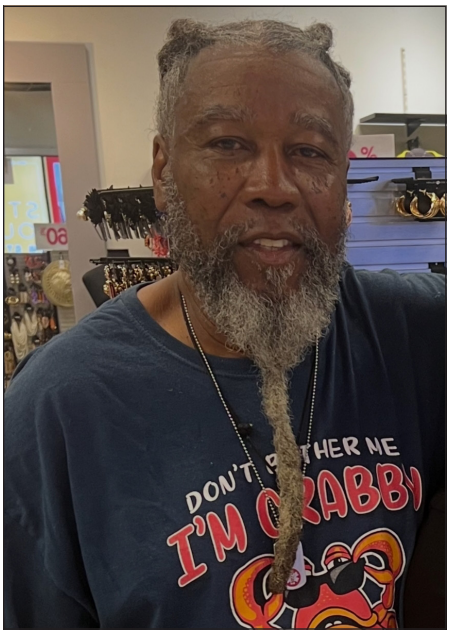


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Portrait of Louis Armstong, Marvin Gaye, Ray Charles, Billie Holiday



To commission or purchase a work of art from Nat Williams, contact him through Facebook or Instagram.



Nat Williams



Portrait of St. Augustine High School Marching 100



2025 Award winning painting "The Skull" Tribute To Jean-Michel Basquiat



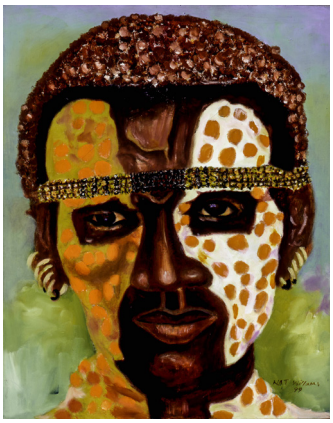
Portrait of Uncle Lionel Batiste



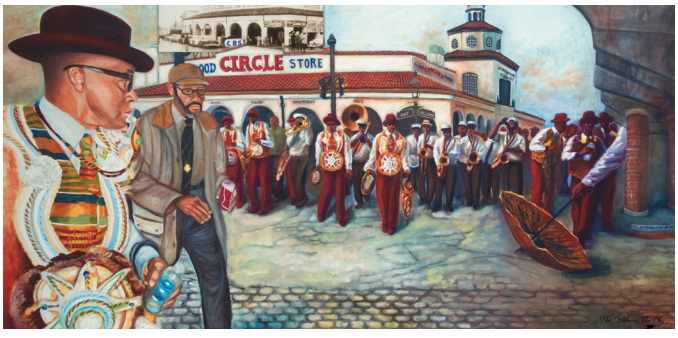
If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation

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Circle Store by Nat Williams