

Asheville artist makes name for himself through social media

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A young Josh Coates stands alongside his mother as she paints murals in the homes of her clients. She would often paint fantasy scenes in children's rooms, inspiring Coates to become the artist he is today.

"I think that is what originally sparked my interest in the arts, just watching Mom doing something she loved," said Josh Coates, a former UNC Asheville student from Wake Forest.

Coates said he started doodling in kindergarten, where he liked to draw penguins. However, it was not until high school that he really started to develop his skills.

"I took art through high school, so art 1, 2, 3 and 4," Coates said. "I realize now how much they helped me develop the fundamentals."

Coates said his main medium is fine-point ink drawing. He likes the contrast the fine-point pen provides for his work.

In 2013, Coates created an Instagram account to post his artwork. He said he originally made the page just to share with friends and anyone else interested.

Coates said he gained popularity on Instagram when one of his drawings was posted by a popular account with over 100,000 followers. The following day he had over 1,000 followers. Since then, Coates' page continues to increase in popularity.

"From that day forward, my account just kinda blew up. I remember I woke up that next morning and someone was like, 'Yo, I see your work on this account right now,'" Coates said. "I was so psyched 'cause I followed that page and always thought how cool it would be to have one of my drawings posted."

Today, with nearly 26,000 followers, Coates has become "Instagram famous."

"I was so stoked for Josh once his account gained so much popularity," said John Hollifield, a UNCA sophomore from Marion and roommate of Coates. "I mean, what else does an artist want than to share their work with as many people as possible?"

Zach Weston-Farber, a junior new media student from Baltimore, said he

PHOTO BY REGINA COATES



Josh Coates stands next to his rendition of downtown Raleigh.

started following Coates's Instagram shortly after he transferred to UNCA.

"I actually met Josh before I even knew he was an artist, it wasn't until one of my friends showed me his page," Weston-Farber said. "I was blown away by how talented he was. He has a super unique style."

Since Coates' account took off in 2014, he has been able to sell his work with the help of Instagram. About 98 percent of his customers come from the website, Coates said.

Coates said he sends interested buyers from Instagram to his website to buy prints. He said he created the website shortly after his page gained fame in order to sell his pieces.

"I'll ship a print out to Australia, then ship one out to England, it's always random," Coates said nonchalantly. "It's not strictly the United States, which is the cool thing about Instagram — it branches out to the entire globe."

According to Statista, a market research statistics aggregator, there are 400 million active Instagram users, all potential customers for Coates.

He often trades work with other artists through Instagram.



ART BY JOSH COATES