

# Artist Shawn Skabelund comments on society through his artwork

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Born in Mount Pleasant, Utah, artist Shawn Skabelund serves as a gift to Flagstaff and any people who have had the pleasure to see his art.

Skabelund is a complete artist; drawing, painting, sculpting and building complete installations are all part of his skill sets.

To Skabelund, art is meant to educate. Skabelund is completely committed to society, and embraces his responsibility.

"For me, as an artist, it is all about educating. I try to educate on what art can really be," Skabelund said. "You can take any material, convert it in art and use it in a gallery."

His themes mostly relate to social issues, politics and more specifically to migration.

In the way that the Ohio River was the border for slaves, Skabelund saw the border from Mexico to the United States as the same idea. He wants to remind people with his work that history repeats itself and that humanity is not yet aware of the natural necessities of people. This no-barriers thought is shown well in his work.

"Since I was in college, I have been looking at the idea of the Manifest Destiny; how tribes have been separated, how we European-Americans had changed the landscape and destroyed cultures," Skabelund said. "Those are the main things I studied as an undergrad, and after grad school my work then started to become more social, political and didactic to show all this."

His commitment to educate goes beyond a canvas or a piece of paper. When he has an idea and a defined concept, his job is only just about to start. He researches about the place where this issue evolved, goes there and lives within the problem. After that, he can start figuring the actual piece.

"Usually what happens is that during the research I figure out what materials I want to use and then the materials. The site where it will be placed tells me about how to design the piece," Skabelund said. "My favorite medium is not the medium itself because the piece should dictate me what materials are best."

His pieces show a contemporary characteristic, where the medium is definitely not traditional. He wants the piece to talk and teach from every single aspect.

"I specifically talk about the United States because I live here; I feel that I cannot talk about any other country, but I feel that I have a right to speak out about what we have done and how this country was settled through slavery and the genocide of Native Americans," Skabelund said. "Now, we manifest today through slavery of Latino cultures. We bring these people in, take advantage and then abuse them."

These didactical ideas came to him after several events in his life that convinced him about his mission. Several artists influenced him, and his faith to his mentors was returned reciprocally.

"My mentor could see that I had the eye for art, but he didn't enjoy installations until he came to my first one, nine years after my graduation," Skabelund said.

As a teenager, he used to see his bedroom as a basement where he could practice drawing. He describes himself as an introvert, and explains how high school defined what he wanted to do after graduating.

"I didn't enjoy high school; I hated it. So, I didn't want to feel that way in college," Skabelund said.

As many artists would agree, the path to artistry is not an easy one, and families do not always agree with this career for their children.

"I used to show my drawings to my parents, but I knew they didn't want me to go this direction because there is no money in the field," Skabelund said. "I am the classical starving artist, but thankfully my wife helps me out."

Right now, the Martin-Springer Institute is showing Skabelund's newest work, "Culpable"; this installation is an example for what this artist believes in. The space, the materials and the organization of every element flow in perfect harmony to show the suffering that surrounds border areas.