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Cosmetics to canvas: Former Fargo makeup artist, hairstylist finds new passion in painting

Written By

Chelsey Ewen
Apr 22nd 2019 - 8am.

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Local artist Nancy Ness with her painting "Leo," a name that belongs to four generations of men in her family. Chelsey Ewen / The Arts Partnership

As a former hairstylist and makeup artist, Nancy Ness says it's in her nature to explore different colors and textures to "make something beautiful."

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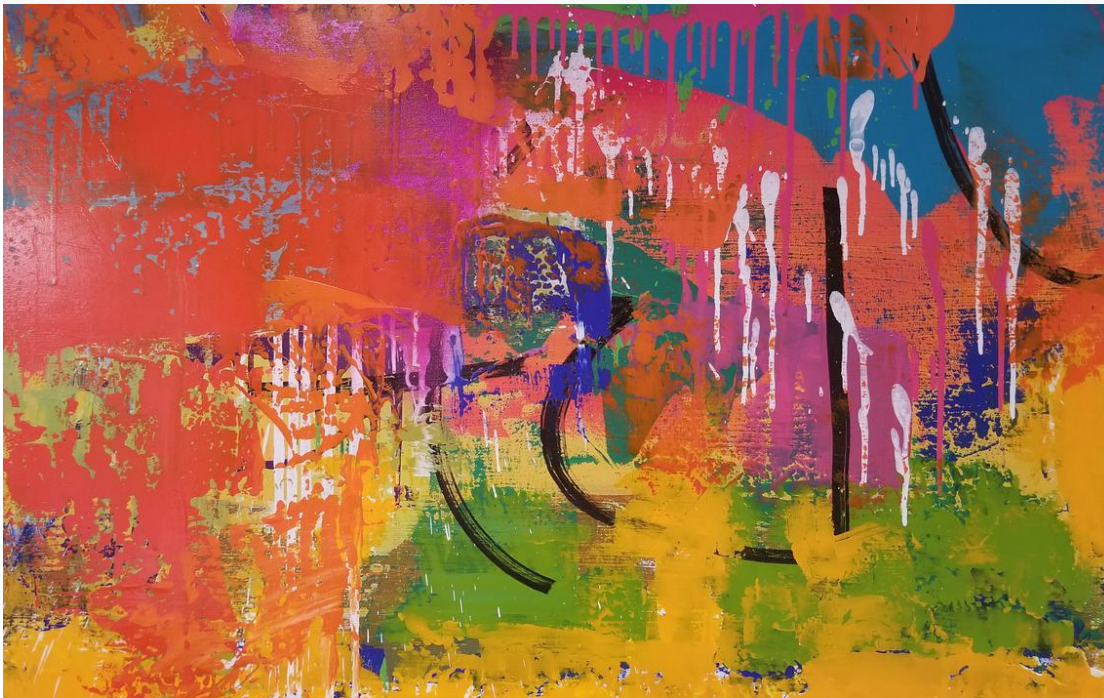
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“I like to see some shimmer, textures and colors in makeup, and it’s the same with paint. You’ve got gloss, matte, semi-gloss... I feel like it’s all in the same family.”

When she started, Ness created paintings for her friends and family. When she posted a pink and gold abstract painting on Facebook, she was pleasantly surprised when a stranger offered to buy it immediately.

“It really goes to show the power of social media,” she says.



"Louise" by Nancy Ness. Nancy Ness / Special to The Forum

This motivated the self-taught painter to continue learning the medium by watching YouTube videos and taking classes with local artists like Zhimin Guan and Barbara Benda Nagle. In the process, she discovered her propensity for creating non-objective pieces using bright, bold colors.

Now, Ness has steady commission requests, a growing social media presence, a website and a spot to sell her work at Gallery 4 in downtown Fargo, which hosts its grand opening reception at its new location 5-9 p.m. Thursday, April 25, at 115 Roberts St. N.

'More than one thing'

Ness is grateful to be one of 13 artists at Gallery 4 – the oldest cooperative gallery in the country – as it allows her to sell her work, reach potential clients and get more involved in the local arts community.

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"Harper" by Nancy Ness. Nancy Ness / Special to The Forum

“He painted signs in his mother-in-law’s garage to put himself through college,” she says. “So he was always my original entrepreneurial inspiration.”

When she isn’t working at the gallery or raising two young children with her husband, Ness paints from the comfort of her basement studio whenever she can. Because of her cosmetology background, Ness says she knows the color wheel “like the back of her hand” and enjoys experimenting with different combinations in her abstract pieces.

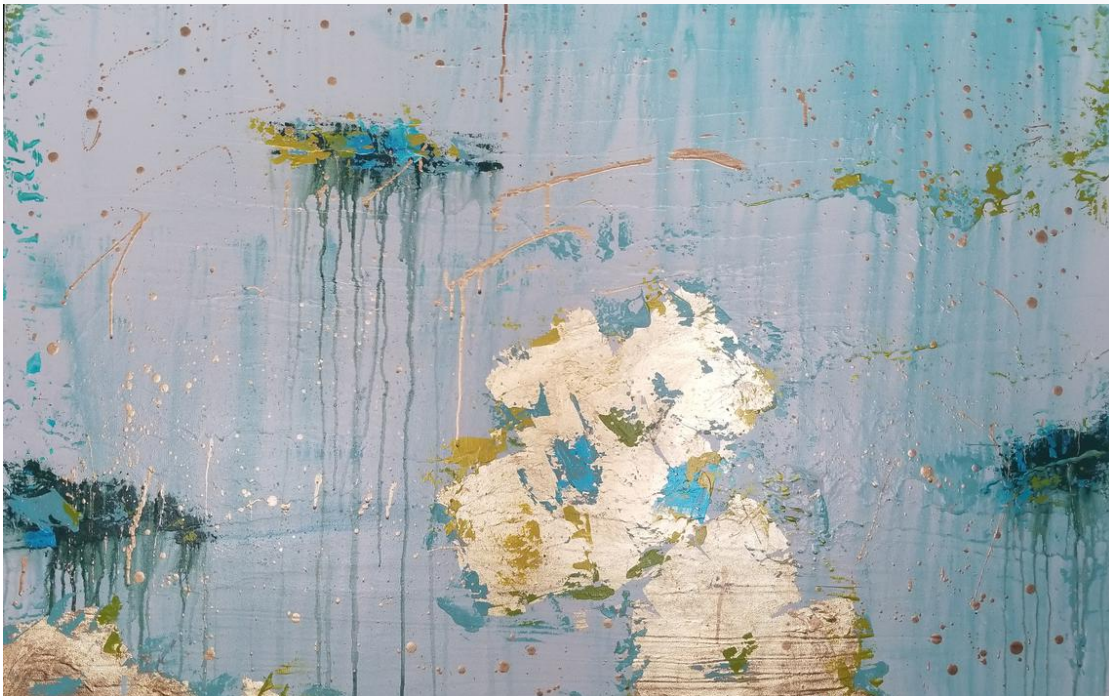
The painter prefers the non-objective style because it “stands the test of time a little longer,” she says. If Ness wants to change direction or makes a mistake, she paints the canvas white and starts over — another skill she learned from her makeup artistry days.

“What’s awesome about painting is that you can continually change it,” she says. “The same thing goes for makeup. You put on your eyeliner and the wing didn’t work, you wipe it off and start again.”

Ness rarely uses a brush in her paintings. Rather, she opts for a palette knife to add texture and “more randomness,” she says. To complete each piece, her husband, who works in construction, builds a frame.

The final touch is the title of the piece — or, rather, the name.

“I name all of my pieces after loved ones in my life,” she says.



“Carson” by Nancy Ness. Nancy Ness / Special to The Forum

The bright blue abstract piece in her living room, for example, is named “Leo” after her great-grandfather, grandfather, father and brother.

“Sometimes I let a piece sit for a few days before I decide what to name it,” she adds.

Going forward, Ness hopes to continue growing her client base and learning the medium.

For more information on Nancy Ness, visit www.nancynessart.com or her [Facebook page](#), Nancy Ness Art.

This article is part of a content partnership with The Arts Partnership, a nonprofit organization cultivating the arts in Fargo, Moorhead and West Fargo. For more information, visit <http://theartspartnership.net>.

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