

MY ARTS STORY

Hunter Cole

Visual Artist

My father encouraged me throughout my childhood and my entire life. Little did he know he was planting the seeds for me to become both an artist and a scientist.

I grew up in San Francisco, where my father and I spent most Sundays visiting the de Young Museum and the California Academy of Sciences, which stood across from each other in Golden Gate Park.

I received my PhD in genetics from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. I was fascinated by genetics at the molecular level and excited about the advances happening in the field. I wanted to be part of it. But my research, a key part of completing my PhD, did not go as well as I had hoped. I received very little guidance from the head of the lab, and the results showed. I became increasingly disappointed and eventually despondent.

My father wanted to help me see things differently and experience another part of the world, so he took me to Paris. That trip changed the direction of my life forever.

At the Musée d'Orsay, paintings I had previously known only as flat reproductions came alive with vivid color, texture and brushstrokes. I came home knowing I had to paint.

After earning my PhD, I taught a couple of classes at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. There, I met a professor who worked with bioluminescent bacteria — living organisms that glow on their own through a chemical reaction. He told me he had drawn a heart for his wife using bioluminescent bacteria.

If you can draw a heart in bioluminescent bacteria, I thought, you can draw anything.



Since that discovery, I have created drawings with bioluminescent bacteria and photographed them as they grow and die. The images become a commentary on our own mortality. I have also created time-lapse videos of the drawings, composed music based on DNA and the protein sequence involved in creating bioluminescence, and photographed entire installations illuminated by the bacteria.

In New Orleans, I created the first installation of living bioluminescent art that visitors could walk through. Now, I'm bringing that experience to Greensboro.

On Thursday, Oct. 22, Studio 503 will host "MOON GLOW: An Illuminated Living Art Experience." All proceeds from ticket sales will benefit The Arts Council of Greater Greensboro.

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My creative work will become an investment in other artists, helping build a stronger creative community across Greater Greensboro.
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For me, it brings together two things that have shaped my life from the beginning — a belief in the power of art and the importance of giving artists opportunities to create.