

11-Year-Old Charles Gitnick's 'Gun Art' Gaining Buzz During Art Basel

By SUZETTE LABOY 12/04/13 12:17 PM ET EST [AP](#)



MIAMI (AP) — Charles Gitnick is only 11 years old, but his art appears far more mature.

The sixth-grader from Los Angeles places toy guns that look like real weapons on a canvas and paints over them, purposely camouflaging them in an abstract design. He says it's a way to express his fear of gun violence.

His work will be on display at an exhibit, "3D Gun Art," which coincides with Art Basel Miami Beach, one the world's most prestigious contemporary art fairs. The event is the U.S. extension of the fair held each June in Basel, Switzerland. It runs through Sunday.

Charles started painting landscapes, seascapes and palm trees at age 5. In 2011, he wrapped a toy rifle in newspaper clippings of violence and mounted it on a canvass of similar news articles.

"This seemed like a way to say to adults that kids shouldn't feel scared as I did - that being at school shouldn't be scary or dangerous," he said.

He has since sold more than three dozen pieces for about \$1,500 each, mostly showcasing his work on streets in California and New York. Charles picks the toy guns depending on what kind of piece he wants to make — either large or small.

"Some of the guns aren't as good for some of the techniques, like for a drip piece, it can't be a gun with bumpy details because then all the paint would just drip everywhere and not look very good," he said.

He then chooses the color of the board he wants to use as the canvass, followed by the color of the gun. Then he mounts them together and, once dried, takes them upstairs to his home studio to paint. There's more drying and the artwork eventually gets framed, photographed and is ready to be sold. The price starts at around \$1,000.

After the Sandy Hook school shooting in Connecticut last December, Charles stopped making art for more than two weeks.

"I was afraid that people would think that I'm for guns and that I'm promoting them," he said.

He uses multicolored and monochromatic images of guns, sometimes by applying acrylic paint with a spring-loaded toy air rifle. He uses techniques by artists who have influenced him, including Jean-Michel Basquiat and Jackson Pollack.

Charles said his friends don't really say much about his art "because they don't get it." Neither do some adults.

"Like when they walk by, people will say that it's really scary. And yeah, guns are really scary," the young artist said. "When I was first starting, there was like a lot of hate. I was really hurt by that in the beginning. But then I realized there is always going to be people hating on it. So I kind of just stopped worrying about that."

His father says people should take a moment to digest the message.

"My child is sort of screaming through his art the fear about being a child in our society," Neil Gitnick said. "We need to watch the art of our youth and see what it tells us about the world we are giving them to grow up in. I think his message is you're scaring me."

