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# Sneaker artist gains widespread media attention



Gabiella DiPietro/News Editor  
Bizon, a Duquesne junior, started customizing shoes in high school.

Gabiella DiPietro | News Editor

10/04/2018

Artists can share their creativity in a variety of ways. Artistic imagination can be channeled through song, dance, sculptures or paint on a canvas, but one Duquesne student has set his sights on a different type of canvas – shoes.

20-year-old Brennan Bizon, a junior information systems and marketing major at Duquesne University's Palumbo-Donahue School of Business, is a custom sneaker artist. His business, Bizon Customs, began in 2014 when Bizon was a sophomore at Cardinal Mooney High School in Youngstown, Ohio.

Bizon learned of the custom sneaker business through the Internet, so he decided to grab a pair and give it a try.

"[Custom shoe art] is actually a niche art that people have been doing for a long time," Bizon said. "I've always done different art things throughout my life, so I just picked up an old pair of shoes I had and did a pair."

From there, Bizon's newfound passion slowly grew into Bizon Customs. He hand paints a wide variety of shoes, including sneakers, cleats and high heels.

"A friend wanted a pair, and it was kind of a domino effect," Bizon said. "That's how I got into the actual business side of it."

Now, Bizon creates a pair of shoes almost every week.

Initially, the customer will provide a pair of shoes for Bizon to work with and instruct him about what type of design they want. From there, Bizon's imagination lets loose.

Depending on the complexity of the work, an average pair of shoes can cost around \$200 or \$300, if not more.

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→ Through his Instagram account, Bizon Customs even struck a deal with the NFL. According to Bizon, an agent direct messaged him on the app asking if he would be interested in creating a pair of cleats for Juju Smith-Schuster, who had not yet been drafted at the time. At first I thought it was a joke, so I accepted the offer but sort of dismissed the idea," Bizon said. "But then Juju called me 10 minutes later and I was thrown into a group chat with him, so I knew it was the real deal."

↑ Since then, Bizon has made multiple pairs of cleats for the NFL's My Cause My Cleats campaign, where players highlighted various charitable causes through their custom cleats during Week 13 on the field.

His most recent pair were created for Steelers running back, James Conner, and received widespread media attention. The cleats' design featured Pittsburgh-native rapper Mac Miller, in honor of his death on Sept. 7 from an apparent drug overdose.

"I hope there are a lot more players that I can do work for," Bizon said.

According to Bizon, his art and his business have come to embody him, and it is how he has come to identify himself.

"When I think of who I am as a person, my first thought is always as an artist," Bizon said. "It's been the one common denominator, and one of the better aspects, of my adult life."

In addition to his business, Bizon is also a student with a full course load of work.

"Balancing school and the business is not easy at all, but I enjoy my art," Bizon said. "I have a routine, where I go to school, then come back to my house and work for a set amount a time. I keep it pretty structured, and it works for me."

Bizon's favorite pair of shoes to this date are Oreos shoes, the first pair of shoes that he ever made.

"The original idea was to make a custom painted shoe in about a week flat. Needless to say, I got a little carried away. These shoes have over 3,000 individual hand painted triangles on them. From start to finish, the shoes took over 100 hours of work ... From there, my business took off," according to Bizon Customs' website.

Going forward, Bizon hopes to grow and expand his business, and he hopes he can incorporate his art into whatever he ends up doing in the future.

The art of Bizon Customs will be displayed in Duquesne's Gumberg Library starting on Monday, Oct. 8, and lasting until Oct. 31. The exhibit, DUQ Creates: Bizon Custom Sneaker Art, is part of the library's new program initiative to showcase art and creative works from the university's students, faculty and staff.

There will be a reception in the library's fourth-floor Popular Reading Room on Tuesday, Oct. 9, from 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. to celebrate and introduce the new exhibit.

DUQ Creates: Bizon Custom Sneaker Art is free and open to the public.

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