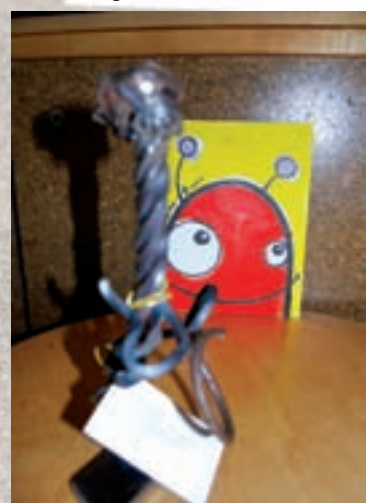




BREN BATACLAN Hope is Where The Art Is

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Photos by CHARINA CARRERA



The colorful painting was propped on a bench in San Francisco with a note that reads "Everything Will Be All Right... This painting is yours to take for free." A young man named Nicholas was walking by when he was attracted to the bright and cheery art. He later wrote the artist to tell him what happened.



"I was walking to work when I found this wonderful painting on a bench and your note. I held it and looked around because I thought someone left it accidentally but no one was near so I took it. I just want you to know that it does make me smile when I look at it. I am about to lose my job soon because the company I work for is going under but with such a small act from a total stranger, you made me smile. I just want to thank you for such a great gift." - Nicholas, San Francisco

Nicholas is just one of hundreds of people around the globe who are smiling more often now and have been given hope in these hard times by Fil-Am artist Bren Bataclan. Often referred to as the "smile artist," Bataclan has left paintings in hospitals, parks, street corners, train stations, unemployment agencies, schools and airports around San Francisco, Boston, New York, Los Angeles, Alaska, Japan, Antarctica and across the globe. Each painting has a note attached to it that made people smile or gave them hope.

Born in Makati, Philippines, Bren immigrated to the US with his family when he was 12 years old. He studied in UCLA and worked in the special effects industry in Hollywood for a time before he went to graduate school in the Ohio State University. He taught computer animation in Boston and then joined the dot com world in the same city. When the dot com world crashed several years ago, he lost his job and didn't know what to do next. He started drawing and decided to put up a show with 56 acrylic paintings. He said he would be happy if three of his paintings sold. Within two days, 49 of his paintings were sold.

"I was so happy for the support I got and I wanted to thank Boston," Bren told Asian Journal. Bren then got the idea of giving away his paintings for free.

"Many people don't go to museums and galleries to appreciate art. Most don't have an opportunity to own art. So, I thought of giving my paintings away, in exchange for a smile" said Bren, who left his paintings in various locations around Boston with notes saying "This painting is yours if you promise to smile at random people more often."

Bren shared that he noticed that the Bostonians were not smiling a lot so he used his colorful artworks to get more Bostonians to smile.

"When someone picks up a painting and I see them smile, I just feel like 'Hey, job well done,'" he said.

Bren left his cheery acrylic paintings in parks, benches, libraries, train stations, street corners, and before long, his "Smile Project" has spread all around. Boston Magazine found one of his paintings and featured his story. Soon, Bataclan's unique and generous endeavor caught the attention of other major media channels such as ABC 7, Smithsonian Magazine, Reader's Digest, Asian Weekly, San Francisco Chronicle, The Examiner, Fox News, Chicago Tribune, Asian Week etc. His work was also published into a 128-paged book by Gingko Press.

A documentary on his Smile Boston Project documentary was done and won the "Best Short Documentary" award at the Woods Hole Film Festival last year. The film was also shown in the Newburyport, New Hampshire, Northampton Film Festivals (Best Regional Film), the Chicago Filmmakers Art Docs Series, and in the European Social Forum in Malmö, Sweden.

When the recession hit the country last year, Bren decided to change the note on his paintings. "Everything will be alright" notes were attached to his paintings which featured a character which has one big and one small eye wearing a grin. It's his way of boosting morale in these hard economic times.

"One woman in New York who owned a store was so down that she was planning to close the store and give up," Bren shared. "She found one of my paintings which said "Everything will be alright" and it was like God was giving her hope. She told me that she decided to hold on. It's been one and a half years now and her store is still open," Bren said.

David Kingsland, principal of Seward Elementary School in Alaska read the Reader's Digest story on Bataclan and went to his website www.bataclan.com. Upon learning all the great things that resulted from Bren's project, he invited him to Seward to share what he has done to the students there. So, Bataclan went to Alaska recently with a small video camera given to him by the CBS evening show of Katie Couric which will do a feature on Bren soon.

Since he started over five years ago, Bataclan has given away over 400 free paintings in 20 cities and 20 countries. He has been commissioned to do murals in schools, parks, hospitals, showrooms, and even designed a colorful patch for the Spread the Bread campaign in the US.

Bren has certainly showed the world how an act of kindness can make a difference in the lives of people across the globe.

So, if you see a colorful painting propped against a bench or leaning by the side of a wall, hurry and grab it. Smile and hope. Everything will be alright!



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Publisher's Note

The Optimistic Artist

In these trying times, it's difficult for most people to feel optimistic. But Bren Bataclan is on a mission -- to spread hope to those who need it through his "Everything will be all right" paintings, brimming with sunshiney cheer. The Asian Journal MDWK Magazine brings you this Fil-Am artist's unique tale -- his own struggles and pains and the courage and optimism he drew from these obstacles. His artworks are certainly a breath of fresh air to those who need it.