

## **There is a Rainbow in Trenton and His Name is Leon**

**By Tammy Duffy**



The art of graffiti writing has been in practice since the stone ages. In the late 1960's this artful revolution started in Philadelphia and then migrated to the New York City Graffitiists. They in turn made it into a global phenomenon on the NYC subway system. Mayor Lindsay raged a war in NYC on the graffiti artists until the last train rolled off the tracks in 1989 to a train graveyard. Some of these talented artists migrated to the "Graffiti Mecca and world renowned 5-Pointz building in Long Island City, NY. This was a place where artists could legally create graffiti work. The name 5Pointz came about because it signified the five boroughs coming together as one but, because of its reputation as an epicenter of the graffiti scene, the industrial complex actually united aerosol artists from around the world.

On August 21, 2013, the New York City Planning Commission unanimously voted to approve plans to build condos on the 5 Pointz site. The amazing work was gone with a swift coat of paint.

In the city of Trenton there is a graffiti artist by the name of Leon Rainbow. Leon was 12 years old when he did his first tag which as he says, "Was probably placed somewhere really dumb", but the placement of his EXTRM tag started it all for Leon. Graffiti artists all have unique names and tags. Another artist in another town can have the same name but a completely different tag.

Leon learned how to do simple and block letters from an early age and has been drawing and creating art ever since. He learned how

to tag from the streets and the more advanced tagging techniques from the likes of Sew, Joe Base and Pose2. Leon has built on his foundation and has a strong connection to hip-hop culture.

Leon made the transition from painting illegal walls to legal walls by going to MCCC and then being awarded small to medium size commissions. He has done pieces for the city of Trenton, the Urban Work Café, advertising for local businesses and many others projects in and outside the city.

There are a multitude of creative projects that Leon is involved in today. Some of his current projects include, the up and coming Jersey Fresh Jam in August 2014, being involved in Terracycle's TV show entitled, Human Resources on Pivot TV, an up and coming art exhibition at Robert Wood Hamilton Hospital focused on street art in September 2014, teaching art classes for the Trenton after school programs and the Hopewell Valley Stampede in August 2014.

The Hopewell Valley Stampede is the first program sponsored by the Hopewell Valley Arts Council. In August, there will be a herd of fiberglass painted oxen roaming throughout the Hopewell Valley. The oxen will be placed in neighborhoods, parks, businesses and schools. It will be a free outdoor museum of oxen for all who live in or visit Hopewell Valley to enjoy.

The Hopewell Valley Stampede generated excitement and interest among local and regional artists who were eager to contribute their talents. Leon has painted two oxen for this outdoor exhibition. This Stampede exhibition by Hopewell Valley also has associated music festivals, art exhibits and other cultural programs. This will help heighten awareness of the arts, promote educational participation, increase the visibility of the region's artists and businesses, and boost tourism. The Hopewell Valley Stampede will

inspire residents and visitors alike to remember the past and celebrate the present.

When I asked Leon what is the piece you are most proud of, he said, “The next one and the mural installation I did at the Ellarslie Museum in Trenton from July-September 2009 (*which is shown at the top of this article*).” It was a mural that was representative of his life. The first section depicted his Native American heritage then migrated to show a baby with a spray can. The baby is Leon; he was born to do this. The child on the tricycle shows Leon riding with his dreams. Leon’s childhood was filled with imagination and creativity that is representative in his work. When Leon was 19 he went through a drug phase that he was lucky enough to turn around and create the positive world he now lives in. Leon is an extremely talented artist positively impacting the community in which he lives.>

