

Q & A

Chris Haberman

Prolific Portland artist Chris Haberman discusses his recent cover art contribution to "I Am Not a Poet: 15 Years of Street Roots Poetry and Art" to be published Feb. 27, 2014.

Q What excited you about the prospect of donating your art to the cover and working with Street Roots?

From the start, I was happy to be part of this project and honored that the Street Roots team suggested me as a cover artist. As a Portland native, I've been reading Street Roots for many years. I've known a lot of the writers, and I completely support the publication and the idea behind it. In college I was an editor at Portland State University's Daily Vanguard—I was actually a writer before I was an artist. As far as donating is concerned, I try to donate as much art as possible to social causes—and this anthology is a great one—it's a project that I am very passionate about and happy to help with.

Q Why was this project important to you?

I am very supportive of Street Roots, p:ear, Outside In, Oregon Food Bank, Salvation Army, Sisters of the Road—really any organization that helps the homeless, or keeps people warm and fed. I appreciate that Street Roots is about more than just money. They're about giving people—folks who are often overlooked—a necessary voice in the community. I did a big mural in The Yamhill Pub in downtown Portland—one of my first—and I did it for free. The bar, which is often frequented by homeless folks, hosted an event called the Drunk Poets Society. A few Street Roots writers would attend, as would I, and read poetry or spoken word and I put this all in the mural. While I'm a "street" artist, I am

not homeless yet have always identified with street culture and been inspired by it in my art. I like to paint people and truth. Street culture is raw and without pretension. I feel it has a lot of human beauty in its plain honesty.

Q What was the process you took to create the piece?

I did several drawings after discussing with Lorna Nakell [of Lorna Nakell Design who created the final cover design] what the "I Am Not A Poet" design team was looking for, discussing what types of my work may work for the cover. I wanted the cover to have an edge and sincerity for Street Roots, but also be playful, colorful, and attractive. I meshed together images of Street Roots folks, a pseudo image of writer Charles Bukowski, and Portland landmarks such as Burnside Street, in an attempt to represent the community without misrepresenting anyone.

Q What do you hope the piece communicates to observers?

I hope that the piece communicates a friendly atmosphere of creativity. Many voices have come and gone through Street Roots. To honor this I hope to visually show a form of travel and expression on the cover, incorporating shanty villages as an homage to Dignity Village, and the river that surrounds us—a sense of a tight knit group of people surviving together with Street Roots as their sounding board and vessel for expression.

Q Which materials and mediums did you use to create the piece?

After drawing and figuring out generally what I was going to do, I created the painting on a found piece of acid-free mat board. It's easier to scan that way and allows for every detail to be represented. I used found acrylic paint, some art paint, pencils, pens and permanent Speedball ink with a brush to line out the piece. When I told the folks at Kinko's what this piece was for they thought it was so great they gave me a discount on scanning it. It takes a village after all. That's why I live in my hometown, Portland, Oregon—because we understand what it means to work together as a community.