Philadephia’s Freedom Artist Spotlight
Interview with Sean Lugo

How did you hear about the opportunity to participate in the Philadelphia’s Freedom exhibition at NLM?
I received an email to submit to the exhibition.

What made you want to submit this specific artwork to the exhibition?
This is a piece that I created a few years ago and the image has held true before its creation, since its creation and will unfortunately still hold true unless we see major changes in our country. It was submitted weeks before any of the BLM protests, but I felt like with the theme of freedom the image reflected one of the most important loses of freedom that some can have.

How do you personally define freedom?
The ability to create art and express my mind to the world is my freedom. I have full control over my mind, so if I have a way to release my creativity and am not held back, that is when I feel the most free.

How would you describe your art?
My art has an illustrative approach – some imagery is funny while other imagery is serious and, a lot of what it is, is what goes on in my head.

How would you describe your process in making art?
First and foremost, I make art for myself. The images in my work are reflections of my life, past and present or of things and people that inspire me. When something really speaks to me and I can visualize it as a piece of art, whether it be a painting or a wheatpaste in the streets, I then work on a mock up, usually taking my own photo references or those from photographers that I admire (with permission). Once I’m satisfied with the mock up, a painting has a collage background that is created and the image painted over it. And a wheatpaste is drawn in my black book, printed to the size I want it as and then hand painted with all line work redrawn before it’s put in the streets.

What mediums do you primarily work with?
My paintings are generally mixed media on wood panel with watercolor and ballpoint pen. Drawings are marker and ballpoint pen. Wheatpastes are acrylic, ballpoint pen and marker on paper.
How does the concept of freedom influence how and what you create as an artist?  
As I said, for me freedom on a personal level is really defined by my ability to express myself, so it is technically in every piece of art that I create.

Has the pandemic and the societal issues we are currently facing had an effect on your processes? If so, please elaborate how.  
Fortunately, my art processes have not been really affected by recent events over the past few months.

How has the pandemic and these societal issues changed the way you perceive freedom?  
Due to my life experiences my views on freedom have not changed. All of these issues were blatant issues before the pandemic and recent protests.

What inspirations tied to the ideals of freedom led you to the creation of the artwork you submitted?  
My main reason for creating the piece is because I was inspired by the South American and Mexican people who try to come to this country to be free. They risk their lives to flee countries where they have little to no freedoms and end of losing their lives at our borders, being left for dead with no one knowing, and little recognition of this ongoing injustice.

What do you hope your audience will take away from this artwork?  
The only thing that I can hope is that it causes a reaction and gives people something to speak about.

What are the requirements you believe need to exist for a country or individual to be indeed free?  
The sad reality is that we will never be free.

Have you ever had your freedom tested either personally or creatively? Please explain.  
Nothing has stopped me from creating. The only thing that can challenge my freedom is my depression, but my will to freely express myself is strong enough to create no matter what.

What do you believe the single greatest threat to freedom is today?  
All of the laws and bills that our government secretly passes on a daily basis.

How would you like to see this concept of freedom evolve in the future?  
Freedom isn’t a concept; it’s an actual thing that every human is entitled to. While I would love to one day see freedom evolve to what the word literally means, as I said, I unfortunately do not see that day coming in my future.

Finally, when you think of someone who embodies the fight for freedom, who comes to mind and why?  
Every immigrant who tries to make a better life for themselves and their families, escaping a life where the freedoms that they are looking for do not exist.