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Union City native is one of 'Us' in Peele's new movie thanks to inspired artwork

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. — While the world's watching Jordan Peele's newest creation, "Us," from behind splayed fingers and popcorn boxes this weekend, MTSU junior and Union City native Phillip Mayberry will be savoring the feeling of seeing his own art in one of the film's trailers.

Mayberry, a graphic design major who now lives in Nashville, was one of thousands of fans around the world who answered an ongoing challenge, via Chocolate City Comics, Instagram and Universal Studios, to create artwork inspired by the new horror movie.

The result is a photorealistic image of Oscar-winning actor Lupita Nyong'o's dual roles in "Us," a split-screen treatment that's as beautiful and puzzling — and horrifying — as the characters.

Mayberry's girlfriend, who's also his publicist, told the Department of Art and Design student about the opportunity, and over New Year's weekend, after a three-day fast, inspiration came to him.

Four hours later, it was done.

"I figured I'd take part in it, not thinking that anything would come out of it," Mayberry explains, "but I put my best creative juices together and came up with what I came up with. It kinda picked up a little notoriety on Instagram, and Universal reached out to me and talked about being on the marketing campaign."

Next thing he knew, Nyong'o was mentioning him and four other artists on her own Instagram feed and linking to a new trailer.

"Ever since we shared the first glimpse of @UsMovie, the fan art creations have been phenomenal," she posted. "To pay tribute to your creations, we collaborated with @pmaxart [Mayberry], @thekalecartel, @jijennings70, @murobhasart & @detail7 and featured their work in this new spot for the movie. I cannot wait for you to see @JordanPeele's masterpiece on March 22, but in the meantime keep the art coming. 🎨🎬📺 I am here for it!! 🙌🏻 #UsMovie #WatchYourself"

You can watch the video at <http://ow.ly/V72g30o8SnX>. Mayberry's artwork is the first featured.

"Just the way they edited the video to make it look like the picture that I'd made ... I was glad to see how they did that," he says quietly.

Peele expressed his gratitude to the artists on the movie's official website before the March 22 nationwide premiere, saying, "The fan art response to the Us trailer has been inspiring. I am in awe of the artists around the world who took time to create these amazing pieces."

Peele also made use of fan art for his 2017 directorial debut, "Get Out," for which he won an Academy Award for best original screenplay. The film also earned him nominations for best picture and best director.

"Art is the one tool we have against the true horrors of the world," Peele said then.

Mayberry creates his art in Photoshop, working, especially over the last four years, to hone his skills with every project. The results all feature his unique perspective on the world.

"I do the Art Crawl in Nashville once a month and people always walk up to my artwork and say 'Are these pictures, or did you draw this?'" he says with a grin.

"I always have to explain that I drew it instead of it being photography. When I tell 'em I do it in Photoshop, they think it's just me working with a photo, but no, I'm drawing it from the sketch up, painting and coloring it digitally, the whole thing."

He's been drawing since childhood, "since I was 4 or 5, ever since I was able to pick up a pen, a pencil, a crayon, anything," and he credits his grandmother as one of his greatest fans and supporters.

"I have to give a big thanks to my grandmother, because she's been one of my biggest inspirations. I remember I had this little homework assignment to draw a log cabin. I was like 5 or 6 and I really didn't know how to draw, from memory or whatever, and my grandmother said, 'Look. Watch this,' and she drew out a log cabin for me. She said, 'Go off this right here,' and I used it like a reference to draw my own. She didn't take it seriously, but she could do it. I'd see doodles, too, on my uncles' homework,

when I was younger, and that would inspire me to do my own thing. My family has been real inspirational to me through the years, whether they knew it or not.”

Mayberry says he’ll continue refining his skills and learning new ones. You can see more of his work at <http://instagram.com/pmayxart>.

“I’m getting as many eyes as I can on my artwork. After school, I’d like to remain in the art field, doing either concept art, animation, and even fashion design — pretty much anything in the design field, because I want to keep growing as an artist and not be boxed in to any one single thing. I just want to leave my mark,” he says.

He admits he will take a little break — to see “Us.”

“I’ve been a fan of his (Peele’s) for a long time. To be willing to take another lane and go off and start creating horror movies — I didn’t see that coming at all,” Mayberry says, chuckling. “I can’t wait to see it. My girlfriend doesn’t like scary movies at all, but she’s gonna go see it with me.”

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