

WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE

From *Animal Farm* to *Animal*, former Eugene hip-hop artist Hanif Panni returns with a stunning art show at Ninkasi

Former Eugene hip-hop staple Hanif Panni (aka Hanif Wondir) is returning to his hometown with a Noah's Ark of artwork in tow — a mandrill monkey, a wolf, a zebra, a lioness, a tiger and an elk are just a few of his traveling companions.

"The *Animal* series I'm doing for this show is definitely putting a spotlight on wild nature and how wild and fragile nature is," Panni tells me over the phone from his home in Monterey, California. *Animal*, a show of multimedia pieces, goes up at Ninkasi's tasting room Jan. 30, during Last Friday Art Walk, and will be on display through February.

Some of the *Animal*'s most eye-popping pieces feature animal visages caught in Technicolor puffs of smoke, like in "Lioness," and a woman with a swirling forest sprouting from her head, both created by layering watercolor paints and digital manipulation techniques.

Panni is best known to Eugene audiences for performing in the early oughts with a different sort of animal, the hip-hop band Animal Farm, as well as 10-piece hip-hop group D-Fault. He also used to write about the hip-hop scene for *EW* and deejayed "Darkside Radio" on KLCC and KWVA.

In 2008, he relocated to Monterey with his wife (former *EW* reporter Kera Abraham Panni) where they had two sons. He now juggles parenthood and deejaying with his graphic art practice.

When living in Eugene, however, Panni quietly toiled away as a visual artist as well. He first became interested in the visual arts as a student at Churchill High School, and his commitment grew while attending community art studios at LCC.



'LIONESS'

Local artists also influenced Panni's style. "I was working a lot with Steven Lopez," Panni says of the former Eugene muralist (now based in L.A.). "After high school he took me under his wing in a lot of ways and taught me Photoshop." Lopez taught Panni how to scan his illustrations and continue to manipulate them digitally. He also points to Eugene artist Dylan "Kauz" Freeman, who would live paint during hip-hop shows.

Panni went on to the UO, where he acquired a fine arts degree. "Some of the courses were mind-altering in a way of forcing you to see art from different perspectives," he says. At the UO, Panni was introduced to the Wacom tablet, essentially a screen that you can draw on with a digital pen, a tool he continues to use to this day.

"I have a small house with two little kids," Panni says, adding that with the tablet "I can make these sweeping images with very little space."

And Panni's images for *Animal* are sweeping in content as well as scope. The piece "Safari," for example, shows a bust of a woman whose rainbow-colored afro is awash with a menagerie of creatures. "I felt that the chaos that is in the human mind, and how many different forms of thinking about nutty things, can make a jungle in your head," he says. "A lot of my pieces have things exploding out of heads."

Returning to Ninkasi for *Animal* is a bit of a reunion for Panni. "Fun fact: I did [Ninkasi's] opening party in 2005," he says. "Eugene will always be my home."

DJ Ceez (aka Cesar Morales), Lisa Vasquez and DJ Reddfox — all old friends of Panni's — will perform opening night 6 to 10 pm Friday, Jan. 30, at Ninkasi (272 Van Buren St.). Panni also hopes to take the stage and says, "Some members of Animal Farm may be coming through." ■

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