

Parrish G. Monk, MBA Ed.D

Written by Tamara T. Moyer, updated by Parrish Monk

As part of my community service requirements for graduation, I was able to secure work with Dr. Parrish Monk, the founder and Executive Director of the Independent Northern Kentucky Artists and Artisans Education Program, 501c(3), (INKAA Education Program). For almost 7 months, I shadowed Dr. Monk at the Art House in Fort Thomas and then later worked for him at the Luxe Art Gallery in Covington, Kentucky, a unique temporary pop-up art shop and collaborative space that occupied one of the many empty spaces in downtown Covington.

The Art House in Fort Thomas, sponsored by the INKAA Education Program, was a unique experience because it was an art gallery, artisan shop, non-profit art business incubator, public art space, and art collaborative all rolled into one, behaving more like an education business than an art gallery. This three-story art gallery, artisan shop, and community gathering place housed the works of emerging artists and artisans and developing small creative businesses from the Northern Kentucky and Cincinnati, Ohio areas, in the same space, next to well-known established artists, sculptors, potters, and small businesses. This was a true collaborative effort; its design was intentional.

At the time, INKAA Education Program's business model at the Art House was unique and novel, focusing on equitable inclusion and opportunities for its collaborative members. Including myself, INKAA Education Program helped birth the art careers and businesses of over 140 artists, artisans, and small businesses from the region.

Dr. Monk ("just call me Parrish, please") asked me to use what I learned about him, what he was doing and trying to do; and what I turned in as my final experiential reflection, to help introduce him to the world. Actually, he asked me to help write his art bio for a community service awards event in Florida, where he was being interviewed for his contributions to the community in which he now lives. The following came from my daily interactions with Parrish, my journaling, recorded interviews, and my final reflection paper for school:

Parrish Monk is a self-taught mixed media artist and artisan living and working in the Central Florida area. He once described himself as:

“...a creative, a visionary, and a scavenger, with an inventor’s/scientist’s/spiritualist’s brain that feels like it may be wired a little differently. Like other creatives, I can visualize what things can become. These ideas start flooding in organically, without my permission or forethought, while I am awake or asleep or even somewhere in between. Beyond a blank canvas, a blank piece of paper, or a lump of clay, my eyes, my mind’s eye, can stare into empty space or at a discarded piece of junk and visualize creating something that doesn’t yet exist. That excites me. My work often embraces contradictions and the dualities present in real life. Not because I aim to be a complex, elusive, or duplicitous pretentious artist; it’s just my natural flow of where my creative energy goes. I work instinctively, merging and mixing unexpected materials—paint, sheet music, metal, thread, ink, plastic, wood, pigment—to challenge traditional boundaries of “fine art.” I believe in making the invisible visible: the hidden energy of people, politics, life, the subtle, yet persistent noise of life, the darkness, the layers of cultural hybridity. My studio is a lab, and my work is a kind of controlled explosion.”

For decades, his feet have walked on distinctly different pathways. In addition to being an artist, artisan, and entrepreneur, Parrish is also a business consultant, curriculum designer, and adult educator currently working as a full-time instructor for WGU’s School of Business.

As an adult educator and faculty member in WGU’s School of Business, Parrish works diligently to help empower adult learners by helping to provide learners with equitable access to quality education and employment opportunities. Parrish is equally passionate about education and art, both fields of human endeavor that allow Parrish to help enrich the lives of others. Parrish has a fervent goal to help make the lives of others better in some form or fashion; that is who he has been since his early days in the U.S. Army as a combat medic until now.

His “why” and “motivation”? In part, what he does and who he is, has been shaped by his troubles and disparate treatment in school, Parrish believes equitable access to a quality education means ensuring that all students have access to the resources and support they need to reach their full academic potential, regardless of their background, circumstances, or any other individual factors. Parrish is doing his part and is focused on

removing barriers and providing individualized support to address specific needs, rather than treating all students the same.

Parrish Monk currently lives in Sanford, Florida, with his wife and youngest of three sons (ages 32, 31, and 20). As a father of three adult sons, Parrish primarily focuses his energy on taking care of his youngest son, Kadin, who is a neurodivergent adult on the Autism Spectrum.

As a creative, Parrish owns Monk Made Consulting LLC., Parrish Monk Arts, and ManHandled Jewelry, where he provides original artworks, unique handmade jewelry, and graphic design services ranging from logo design to illustrations and printable digital assets, book and page layout design et cetera.

Primarily known for his powerful, thought-provoking artwork, Parrish's mixed media artwork often includes upcycled materials, old sheet music, specialized paints, and experimental painting techniques. Many of his paintings are often very heavily textured and look and behave more like 3D wall sculptures, but each piece has a significant meaning. There is an inherent vulnerability in Parrish's art, which reveals his soul, passion, and beliefs. Parrish's ability to tell a story in his work creates an opportunity for conversation and authentic human connection while giving the viewer a glimpse into raw, unfettered creativity.

Parrish is humbled by the opportunity and the opportunities that he had to share his artwork with others. Since first showing his art in 2011 at *Mudlark Pottery Studio and Gallery* in Warsaw, Kentucky, the Gallery Experience in Cincinnati, Ohio, and selling his artwork on the streets of Cincinnati, Ohio, as of July 2025, Parrish has sold over 713 pieces of original art across the globe. He hasn't made any prints of his artwork yet; he believes in offering others the option to bring an original art piece into their lives.

Parrish went from selling his artwork on a street corner in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 2011 to having his artwork purchased by various TV shows (e.g., HBO's *Enlightened*, *Magnum PI*, *Hawaii Five-0*, and *Star*) and gracing the cover of several published books. However, what Parrish appreciates the most is the opportunity that he is given to play a small part in adding some value to the lives and homes of others and helping others achieve success.

A good portion of Parrish's artwork can be seen in his studio space (Studio #7) at Gallery on First in Sanford, Florida. Viewers and visitors alike, immediately notice that Parrish does not stick to one theme, style, color palette, or medium. They also notice that the

work is original even if it is part of an ongoing series. For those that can truly appreciate it, they know they are getting a one-of-a-kind original work of art. Parrish DOES NOT make prints of his work but instead provides his clients and collectors with affordable original pieces of art. His business motto says it all, “Be Unique, Buy Original™”. As a recent transplant to Sanford Florida, Parrish’s work can now be seen at Gallery on First in Sanford Florida.

A LONG STORY MADE LONGER

Parrish still considers himself to be a working and vending artist

After years of being in multiple galleries and shows (e.g., the Gallery Experience, Mudlark Studio and Gallery, Under the Stars, Lydia’s on Ludlow, Café Vivaci, Lux Art Gallery, Inspirado @the Madison Gallery, The Art House in Fort Thomas, The Covington Makers Mart et cetera) Parrish still considers himself to be a working and vending artists which he thoroughly enjoys at the moment. Parrish enjoys traveling and participating in juried art shows and related events, where he gets to connect with new collectors and meet new people. He admits that this lifestyle is challenging the older he gets; therefore, he maintains his work at various art galleries and shops. Consequently, Parrish is focused on diversifying his opportunities, including learning and development consulting, creating digital assets, curriculum design, and publishing his own illustrated novels.

The Soldier to Educator

Teaching business and human resources management, Parrish serves as a full-time adult educator at WGU’s School of Business. However, Parrish’s adult work-life started as a member of the U.S. Army. His military career spiraled after injuring his knees while showing a friend’s daughter how to do a cartwheel. Born in Texas on a military base in the beginning of his father’s 27 years in the US Air Force, but after his father’s 2 tours in Vietnam, Parrish enjoyed the life and global travels of a military brat. Traveling and living across the globe informed Parrish’s exposure and appreciation for the diverse multicultural world that we live in. This worldview has been incorporated into his artwork, where you will often find embedded symbolism, cultural influences, and even spiritual derivations from other cultures. Look for the scalene triangles, golden ratios, paired colors, and other symbols. Look for the scalene triangles, golden ratios, paired colors, and other symbols.

Symbolism in art uses objects, figures, colors, or other visual elements to represent deeper meanings, ideas, or emotions beyond their literal appearance. It functions as a visual language to communicate complex concepts, evoke emotions, and tell stories, transforming art into a dynamic dialogue between the artist and viewer.

The Point of No Return...

Considered by some art critics and reviewers as a promising emerging African-American artist, Parrish remarks that he slowly began his journey as an artist in November 2011 when he finally overcame his paralyzing fear of sharing and his work publicly and being criticized for not being a trained artist with an impressive pedigree. Being a late bloomer, Parrish did not unleash his creativity until later on in his life. In an interview, Parrish recalled a moment when he first felt a strong urge to be creative.

This moment occurred when his wife was in the midst of battling against breast cancer and his youngest son was diagnosed with Autism. Parrish needed to be present in his own home and calm during this storm, and began creating art and making jewelry as an outlet. Notably, the turning point in his art career was when his employer suddenly and unexpectedly closed their college campus down in December 31, 2013.

At that moment, Parrish became a full-time artist on January 1, 2013 while he was searching for another steady job as an adult educator. With his last day of a seemingly secure full-time job behind him, his choice was simple: he needed to focus on his future and take care of his family by any means necessary. Parrish also needed to maintain his autonomy and have control over his time in order to take care of his wife and be present for their three sons. Becoming a serious, focused, full-time working artist was the pathway forward.

Since first showing his art at *Mudlark Pottery Studio and Gallery* in Warsaw, Kentucky and the Gallery Experience in Cincinnati, Ohio in 2012, Parrish has sold over 713 pieces of original art across the globe. Parrish went from selling his artwork on a street corner in Cincinnati in 2011 to having his work purchased by HBO and gracing the cover of several books. The multiple sales and the sale of 6 pieces of art to HBO via his Etsy shop empowered Parrish and gave him the courage to finally say he was an “artist”. Prior to that, Parrish was still afraid to classify himself as an artist.

After years of being in multiple galleries and shows in the region (*e.g., the Gallery Experience, Mudlark Studio and Gallery, Under the Stars, Lydia’s on Ludlow, Café Vivaci,*

Lux Art Gallery, Inspirado @the Madison Gallery, The Art House in Fort Thomas, The Maker Mart, The lake County Art Museum et cetera) Parrish still considers himself to be a working and vending artists which he thoroughly enjoys at the moment.

Parrish's strength is making authentic connections and engaging the public concerning his art.

Viewers and visitors alike, immediately notice that Parrish does not stick to one theme, style, color palette, or medium. They also notice that the work is original, even if it is part of an ongoing series. For those who can truly appreciate it, they know they are getting a one-of-a-kind original work of art. Parrish DOES NOT make prints of his work but instead provides his clients and collectors with affordable original pieces of art. His business tagline says it all, *"Be Unique, Buy Original™"*.

Parrish's work includes handmade one of-a-kind pieces of jewelry from his ManHandled Jewelry™ line; his unique, hand-tied hybrid fiber art scarves he calls ManHandled Mufflers©; pottery and ceramicware; clay and mixed media sculptures; upcycled wood artwork; and of course, his unique paintings.

What is it not?

Parrish's paintings often included: upcycled materials, impasto, sheet music, mixed-media and other additives and specialized paints, and experimental painting techniques. Many of his paintings are often very heavily textured and look and behave more like 3D wall sculptures. There is an inherent vulnerability in Parrish's art, which reveals his soul, passion, and faith to share new works that are often experimental in nature. Parrish's ability to tell a story using mixed media creates an opportunity for conversation, authentic human connection, while giving the viewer a glimpse into raw, unfettered creativity.

As a sort of rebel, Parrish has multiple bodies of work but unlike many artists he does not hoard or collect his own work waiting for an opportunity for a solo show or until he is picked up by another gallery. While his work has ranged in styles, his best-known approach to his paintings was coined by several art gallery owners jokingly trying to classify Parrish's style of work during a gallery opening at the Gallery Experience in Cincinnati. They came up *"Abfigminimalism"* (=abstract+ figurative+ minimalism) in jest, to denote his combination of styles and principles that can be found in one single work.

This made-up classification stuck, grew and became part of his branding in the Cincinnati region and beyond. Thereby, Parrish has been branded as an *Abfigminimalist* to some and an *Abstract Expressionist* to others. However, most people just call Parrish a “Renaissance Man” because he is very diverse and capable of doing so much.

When asked how he classifies his own work, Parrish will argue and ask why does he need to be put in a box? Parrish once said in a Cincinnati Inquirer interview, “I am still trying to find my voice as a creative and in the meantime, I am still learning, growing and living as an artist, but I can’t do any of that if I am stuck in somebody else’s coffin”.

The Reward

Parrish has won multiple awards for his artwork, but is most proud of three things: 1. Winning First Place in Pastels at the Boone County State Fair in 2012 (This was his first contest);

2. The humbling fact that over 700 pieces of his art were willfully chosen to be a part of someone else’s life.

3. And being in a comfortable position to freely donate art and his time to help with good and noble causes and organizations such as Autism Awareness, Breast Cancer Awareness organizations, or women’s abuse shelters.