

Q&A with Charles Fazzino, Official Artist of the NFL

Written by Adreana Young

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The officially licensed artist of the National Football League and Major League Baseball, Charles Fazzino, has been creating pop art for the Super Bowl's for the last 14 years. The bright colors and pop-out layering effect give Fazzino's 3-D style a look of its own.

By: Adreana Young



Arizona Foothills: Can you tell me a little about what you do?

Charles Fazzino: I'm a New York City Artist, I've been creating artwork in this 3-dimensional style for over 30 years--not that long doing football and baseball pieces, I've been creating 3-dimensional artwork for that many years. For many people who haven't seen [my work], the best way to describe it is they sort of look like a pop out children's book, but it's art work.

I create an original painting and then make hand-made prints here in New York at my studio. Then, I take the hand-made prints and with an exacto-knife I cut out pieces of the print and I build it up, almost like layering a lasagna...to give a dimensional look to the artwork. What it does is sort of creates this illusion of being 3-dimensional because of the way it's layered.

I was the first artist to use this type of artwork as art. Previously, the artwork was used really as a craft form--decopatch, is one name that used to be used for this type of layering prints, it was also called paper tooling, that's an art form done by, I think, the French and used to decorate furniture and other sorts of furnishings for homes back in the turn of the century--so that's the best way to describe it.

AZFoothills: How did you start making this type of artwork 30 years ago? What inspired you to start doing this layering effect?

CF: Well, I loved to draw as a kid; my parents are both artists, and I always saw them drawing; we had a very creative household...so it was sort of a natural thing for me.

I loved pop-out books as a kid, so when I went to art school here in New York at the School of Visual Arts back in the late 70s, I wanted to do something different and professors always said 'If you want to stand out in the arts you have to do something different...' So I was doing these whimsical paintings and drawings with my artwork and then had the idea to do something that sort of emulates a pop-out book and showed [my work] at a local show in New York City in the spring time of 1980.

[I] took some of my handmade prints that I had printed in school and cut them out and made them 3D, and really tried to make them look like a pop-out book. In doing so I sort of stumbled upon a new art form that really, back in 1981, appealed to people...and still today when people see them, it always looks new, it always looks exciting, and I was the first artist to use this style, so my name has become synonymous with this 3-dimensional effect.

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AZFoothills: Can you talk about how you got involved with the football and baseball world?

CF: About 15-20 years ago [was] when I first started with baseball. I live not far from the Bronx, New York, which is right outside New York City, near Yankee Stadium. I'm not a huge baseball fan, but loved the whole thing, the whole experience of going to a baseball game. So in the early days Major League Baseball had seen a show of mine in New York, and one gentleman who was working in Major League Baseball liked what I was doing and I approached him and said I would love to do a piece on the Yankees and use the logos to create a piece on Yankee Stadium. He gave me a license to do a piece for the Yankees. The minute I did it it was sold out in art galleries everywhere. It was a really popular piece

After creating a Yankee's piece I did a Mets piece and a couple of others and it led to doing pieces with the NFL.

Years later the NFL asked if I was interested in creating artwork for the Super Bowl, because they thought [my work] was interesting, new and different and nothing that they were licensing to date compared to what I was doing. So they asked me if I wanted to be their commemorative artist, which I agreed to, and I did the first piece for the NFL back in Super Bowl 35.

It was a big hit and it's just continued from that. I'm doing the artwork for the NFL for the past 15 years, the official commemorative artwork for the NFL, and also for All Star games for Major League Baseball for about 13 or 14 years.

AZFoothills: Growing up as an artist, did you ever think you would be using your art for sports?

CF: Never. If someone was to tell me 20 years ago I was going to be a big sports artist I would say 'impossible.' Now it's so funny that I'm doing the Olympics and I did Brickyard and the Indianapolis 500 and hockey and racing and all these different sports programs and so forth, I'd tell them they were crazy.

AZFoothills: Why do you think the sports world is so attracted to your work?

CF: I'm not really sure. I just think that the work itself translate to every media and everything. I'm not only doing sports, I've also created art for the Grammy Awards, for the past five Daytime Emmy Awards--I've never done the Oscars, though I'd love to--I've created artwork for so many different programs and companies and events. I've sort of become the go-to artist for events in this country...And every year it's different, depending on what year, what place and what sport.

AZFoothills: If somebody were interested in purchasing your work how can they do that and how much do they cost?

CF: The posters are sold and I sign them at different events in Arizona, like the convention center, and at the stadium I do signings. The 3D pieces are sold online through the art galleries nationwide and at the NFL experience, which we have a whole art gallery set up.

The posters usually sell for \$40 signed...The limited editions sell for about \$1,500, framed. Then I also create a whole collection around the print where I make a small mini print for people, which is around \$200, I hand paint helmet and make them 3-dimensional. I hand paint footballs that are made out of wood that I get here in New York then I make those 3D, and they're put into a beautiful plexiglass case that's then sold as a sculpture that we show at the events. Then I also show one-of-a-kind original paintings based on the two teams that make it to the Super Bowl. All year I've been preparing, so I have helmets of different teams, so I know as soon as the two teams who are announcing going to the Super Bowl, I have helmets ready to go.

AZFoothills: You've been doing this for 30 years, and you've been doing the baseball and football for 15 years. Do you have a favorite piece?

CF: Every year I have a favorite. This year I have a favorite piece and it's a new piece on New York which is called Come Fly with Me Let's Fly Away, and it's about all the new buildings that are coming up in New York and all the construction, really the new view of the skyline. So every year I have a favorite. Last year I had a Venice piece that was my favorite, and it was titled in Italian, and it appealed to people who've traveled to Venice.

AZFoothills: Where do you see yourself professionally in five years? What do you see yourself doing?

CF: Every five years I have a five-year plan. My five-year plan, which I actually was thinking about what I'd like to do in the next five years, and that is to really get my artwork to be shown in more art museums.

I'm having a show coming up in March in Florida at the Coral Springs Museum, which is showing most of my comic book art. The originals are all one-of-a-kind paintings...I just took commission for a hospital project. I'm doing a 40-foot mural for the new Hassenfeld Children's Hospital here in New York...I'm going to be the artist who's doing the lobby...it's going to be a huge mural with lights to show New York City in a full day, going from daytime to night time back to daytime. [This] should be done by the end of 2016.

AZFoothills: Who are you rooting for in the Super Bowl?

CF: Well, you know it's funny, when the New York Giants are not in it, or the Jets, my New York teams, I usually look for the best turnout of who collects Charles Fazzino, and that's usually people in the north east, that's my biggest market. So...I'm hoping for the Patriots.

Charles Fazzino will be at the NFL Experience at the convention center for signings Jan. 28-31 before the Super Bowl. The entire Fazzino collection will be on display for fans to see. The store will be open Jan. 27 through Super Bowl Sunday.