

ART, CULTURE, STYLE OF THE PROGRESSIVE SOUTH

# TOWN



IN RECOGNITION OF UPSTATE  
UPLIFTERS, HELPERS, AND  
HEALERS, WE SHOWCASE  
ARTIST NICOLE SHANNON,  
GIVEN BOUTIQUE, THIS YEAR'S  
**CHARITABLE GIVING AWARDS**  
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Photograph by Jack Robert Photography



*Nicole Shannon's art fosters community support at Greenwood Genetic Center.*

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through rose DNA

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# RARE ROSES

DECODING THE STORY OF CONNECTION, CLARITY, AND LOVE IN ARTIST NICOLE SHANNON'S RARE ROSES SERIES

BY J. MORGAN MCCALLUM • PHOTOGRAPHY BY JACK ROBERT PHOTOGRAPHY

**T**ake a closer look at the vibrant artwork blooming across the walls of the Greenwood Genetic Center, and you'll notice something extraordinary: these roses aren't like any other in the world. They are evidence that the most beautiful living things are often the most uncommon—perfect in their genetic imperfection.

"My son Quinn is really the inspiration for the series," says artist Nicole Shannon, noting that Quinn was born missing 263 genes. The artwork on display at GGC are giclée prints of the originals, which are surprisingly small. "To be completely honest, I did them in bed because I was exhausted," reveals Shannon. "For the most part, I took care of Quinn 24/7," she reflects, an all-consuming process that required constant care and complex equipment like an oxygen machine.

"We're on the other side of it now, and he's much more of a stable little boy who just has some developmental delays. But for a while there, he was on and off hospice [care], and it was pretty intense," says Shannon. "My only opportunity to take a breath was in bed—so I painted on a laptop table with a book light. The series became a way for me to express my belief that everyone is uniquely beautiful and deserving of love, regardless of their DNA."

Why roses as her form of expression? Shannon explains: "Globally and across cultures, roses are seen as beautiful—used as metaphors for love and beauty. A rose is a living thing with the potential to have mutations. So I searched for roses that had mutations and found these fascinating pictures. This is what unique DNA can look like in a flower. It exists in everything living—and that's beautiful."

Shannon hasn't always worked in watercolor. In fact, they're a departure for the professionally trained sculptor and goldsmith, who has had her jewelry showcased in Milan, Italy, and the pages of *Vogue Italia*, as well as fashion shows in New York City. It wasn't until Shannon took her work digital, however, that its reach really blossomed.

"Although they started as ink on paper, my husband encouraged me to scan them and turn them into NFTs," she laughs, admitting it wasn't something she would have thought to do on her own. "And once they were online, I saw an outpouring of responses from people, which was really amazing." At first, it was mostly her artist friends that commented, but soon messages from parents of children with special needs from all around the world—and specifically children with unique DNA—began to flood in. "The messages were really inspiring. They mentioned how moved they were by the roses, and how the message it conveyed brought them to tears. That's when I realized that this is more than just therapy for me—and that maybe I needed to show these to others."

Shannon reached out to the Greenwood Genetic Center to see if they would be interested in showing one or two. "Lori [L. Bassett, director of communications] responded with this really generous email talking about how much she loved them, and wanted to show all of them," says Shannon.



"I was delighted when Nicole reached out to me earlier this year to offer her *Rare Roses* painting series as an exhibit at GGC," adds Bassett. "She expressed how much our support meant to her at a critical time in her family's life, and we are honored that she wanted to share these personal and beautiful works of art, and their important message, with our employees, patients, and community."

"I realized that this was a great opportunity for me to give back to the center, too, which was the first place that I found hope and a path forward after my son was born," Shannon says. "They gave us clarity on his condition and connected us with other support networks that we still use today. I decided to donate 80 percent of the sale price [back to the Center]—it felt like the least I could do. Greenwood is an amazing organization. I would recommend them to anyone that needs to learn more about their own DNA or the DNA of a loved one. Their geneticist even drew us diagrams to explain specifically what was going on with his DNA, and made sure that we understood it well enough to explain to our own family members."

The series has both helped Shannon navigate a difficult journey and rediscover her passion for art. "I love the process of making things; it's where I find peace and clarity, and something magical happens when it's all over and you can share your work with the world, or gift it to others. It becomes its own thing outside of me, and carries its own meaning for the owner," she reflects. "I'm passionate about people realizing their creativity and utilizing it, because it not only benefits the wellbeing of our culture and our species, but it also works for the wellbeing of our souls. I think when we're thriving at our best, we are creative—no matter the discipline or art form."

Next for Shannon? Collaborating with other Upstate artists to curate a powerful group show. "[It's centered on] the idea that we can become more beautiful in our broken places. And that strength doesn't necessarily come from our rigidity, it comes from our malleability," she says, referencing *kintsugi*, the traditional Japanese art of repairing broken pottery with gold that accentuates its cracks. "What a beautiful thing it would be to reach out to the larger art community and say, 'Show us how you're healing. Show us the representation of growth from trauma, because we've all been through things.'" T





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**–Nicole Shannon**