

# Unique Vision

*Visually impaired  
artist uses big  
canvasses and larger  
than life subjects  
to portray the art  
and the attitude of  
characters*

Walk across the art-festooned landscape of the American Gallery in Sylvania, Ohio and, out of the corner of your eye something seems to follow you every step. You stop and look. Hanging on the wall is a five foot tall painting of a Western lawman—gleaming badge, big mustache, bigger hat, rendered in multiple shades of leather and dust. He squints down at you along an arm that terminates with the wide barrel of a six-shooter. He’s the good guy and you, presumably, are the bad. You take a few steps to your left. Surprisingly, the gun follows you. A few steps in the other direction and the reaction is the same. The lawman’s expression says it all, *That’s Far Enough*. In fact, that is the name of the piece, painted by artist, David Wisnewski.

“I’ve been exposed to art all my life,” said Wisnewski. “My mother was a painter so art was



**That's Far Enough**  
Oil on canvas  
48"x 50"

always around. In the third grade I took a painting to school, not knowing there was such a thing as talent. My teacher liked it so much, she put it on an easel in the hallway. That was the first time I learned what it was like to have my artwork be appreciated.”

The cowboy theme is very popular with Wisnewski and he paints his images on very large canvasses with broad brush strokes and thick applications of paint. To add to the nearly three-dimensional effect, he often adds sawdust, sand, birdseed and other materials to the paint. “Not only does texture interact with the light of the room but also lends itself to the expression of the subject. Sometimes it adds a shadow or highlight to a face that represents the contraction or extension of one of the many facial muscles. This ever-so-slight adjustment to the face of a subject can express a variation in countenance.”

After viewing a few of his works, you quickly come upon common themes: the monochrome color choices and wide-brim hats casting shadows over barely discernible eyes. “I generally use monochromatic earth tone color schemes but sometimes add slight amounts of a muted color to certain areas. I do not want color to compromise the character. I want to see and feel the attitude above all else and not be overly concerned with the hue.”

The obscured eyes are kind of a self-portrait, according to Wisnewski. “In 1987, my vision went to 20/200 with glasses. It happened all of a sudden, within a month. I was diagnosed with diabetic neuropathy. It was like driving off a cliff. The Sight Center of Northwest Ohio saved me. They gave me a vocational evaluation and I showed them some examples of my artwork from after the sight loss. They asked a University of Toledo professor to judge the work without knowing I was legally blind. She saw that I had talent and helped me to get an art degree. I graduated Suma Cum Laude from



**Tin Stars**  
Oil on textured  
canvas  
72" x 42"

the University of Toledo even though I was visually impaired.”

The first painting Wisnewski sold after losing most of his sight was part of his cowboy theme. He had visited the American Gallery and left photos of a painting with the gallery manager, Toni, Andrews. A visitor saw the photos and immediately wanted the painting. Andrews tells the story of a man and his wife who came in to the gallery. He fell in love with one of Wisnewski’s paintings. When he came back to purchase the painting, it has already been sold. He was very upset. Little did he know, his wife had secretly purchased the painting. Six months later, on the man’s birthday, his wife sent him down to the wine cellar. He found the painting hanging there. The discovery left him in tears.

“It’s hard for me to put a value on my paintings,” said Wisnewski. “I feel attached to them. I’m concerned about where they go. They’re like living things to me.”

Wisnewski is interested in traveling in the west, both to see how his work sells there and to get more of a feel for where his western-themed subjects live. “I’m also interested in doing a series on the Dust Bowl period of the 1930s and paintings of Civil War soldiers.

In spite of his visual impairment, Wisnewski paints without his glasses. “It allows me to not get hung up on the details. I’m looking for the attitude of the characters. They’re larger than life size because of my poor vision. My wife, Sally, is my eyes. She tells me if the nose droops too much or if the eyes are too squinty. We’ve been a team for thirty years.