

UA grad makes his mark on Nike



Courtesy Nike

Nike products using designs by the O'odham artist Dwayne Manuel. Courtesy Nike

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Traditional O'odham imagery, including the iconic Man in the Maze, can now be found on Nike shoes and apparel, thanks in part to a recent University of Arizona graduate.

Dwayne Manuel, who received his master of fine arts degree from the UA last fall, collaborated with the sneaker giant to create its O'odham-inspired Desert Journey Collection, a sportswear line that was released in conjunction with the Super Bowl on Feb. 1.

Where they're sold

Sneakers from the Desert Journey Collection are available at Champs Sport at the Tucson Mall, 4500 N. Oracle Road, and online at nike.com.

The pieces reflect Manuel's O'odham heritage. An adjustable baseball cap with whirlwind and war shield designs on the lid, similar to designs found on O'odham baskets, runs \$30 on the website [Nike.com](https://www.nike.com).

The collection's Air Trainer 3 Premium men's sneakers, at \$130, also sport the whirlwind and war shield, as well as the Man in the Maze on the shoes' tongues. The imagery shares real estate with the internationally recognized Nike swoosh along the shoe's profile.

The look of the line was enough to get the attention of basketball titan **LeBron James**, who posted a photo of a pair of the Desert Journey Collection's Air Vapor Untouchable sneakers on his Facebook and Instagram feeds earlier this month.

The image garnered more than 51,000 "likes."

Manuel is a member of the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, a sovereign tribe in the metropolitan Phoenix area, east of Scottsdale.

It is one of the four federally recognized O'odham tribes, including the Gila River Indian Community, the Ak-Chin Indian Community and the Tohono O'odham Nation.

Manuel said his ideas for the Desert Journey line were heavily influenced by his mother, **Alice Manuel**, who has been weaving O'odham baskets for more than three decades.

The concepts were compounded by Alice's years working at the Huhugam Ki Museum, which showcases the history, heritage and culture of the O'odham and Piipaash tribes that make up the Salt River community, through baskets, pottery, photographs and other mediums.

"Those traditional designs were ingrained in me growing up," Dwayne said.

According to Nike representatives, Manuel was chosen upon the recommendation of members of the Salt River community.

The 30-year-old, Arizona City resident is considered by the community to be an up-and-coming artist with a unique, fresh style, Salt River spokeswoman **Janet Johnson** said via email.

His love for creating goes back to his childhood, growing up on reservation land.

Early works revolved around darker subjects, black-and-white drawings depicting skulls and demons.

"That has always been my thing," Manuel said.

His interest in art in high school put him on the path to the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where Manuel received a bachelor of fine arts degree.

In 2011, he enrolled at the University of Arizona. It was while attending the UA that Manuel began exploring works that more directly related to O'odham culture.

His first solo exhibition, "Expansion: Contemporary Adaptations of Traditional Hu'a Designs," was held at the Tohono O'odham Nation Cultural Center and Museum last May in Sells.

The exhibition showcased large, colorful acrylic paintings of basket designs with abstract urban landscapes.

For his master's thesis exhibition last fall, Manuel's paintings revolved around what he considers prominent American Indian issues, including diabetes and addiction.

Even his graffiti art incorporates tribal elements.

Manuel, who goes by the name **Dwayno Insano** in some of his works, has been commissioned for aerosol murals in Tucson and Phoenix.

In November, he helped organize the “Neoglyphix: All Indigenous Aerosol Art Exhibition” on the front lawn of the Arizona State Museum at 1013 E. University Blvd. The show featured American Indian artists from across the state.

“I wanted to show the world that Native American art is more than just feathers and other cliches,” Manuel said. “There is a lot of talent out there.”

Manuel said he is pleased with how the Desert Journey sneakers and apparel turned out.

But Manuel said reaction from members of the Salt River Community and the Tohono O’odham Nation have been mixed.

Johnson said the community supports its local artists, including Manuel, who has returned home since graduation to teach art at Salt River High School.

She said Salt River did not receive compensation for the use of the imagery but saw it as a way to promote education about the community.

“With its already commercial use, it is hoped individuals would take time to learn more about its meaning, the use and the tribes it comes from,” she wrote about the Man in the Maze.

Representatives from the Tohono O’odham Nation did not return phone calls seeking comment, and the shoe line wasn’t heavily promoted in Southern Arizona.

Jeffery Juan, a health education specialist for the Healthy O’odham Promotion Program in Sells, stumbled upon a pair of the shoes at Champs Sports in the Tucson Mall.

“I was shocked when I saw them,” Juan, 28, said. “The symbol means a lot to a lot of people.”

Juan bought a pair at Champs and then a second pair online.

He saw it as a symbol of pride.

“It gives you the opportunity to let people know that this is your tribe,” he said.

But when he wore his new sneakers to the annual Tohono O’odham Nation Rodeo & Fair, held west of Sells earlier this month, he received a different reaction.

“I had people stop and ask me who gave Nike permission to do this,” he said. “It is not a fashion statement to some people.”

Manuel, who declined to share how much he was paid for the collaboration, said he realized that using that image might be considered controversial, but “the way I was taught, it means something different to everybody. I felt it represented the people.”

“Everybody has their own opinion on what’s right and what’s wrong when it comes to traditional designs,” Manuel said. “I am not trying to pay attention to any of it.”

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