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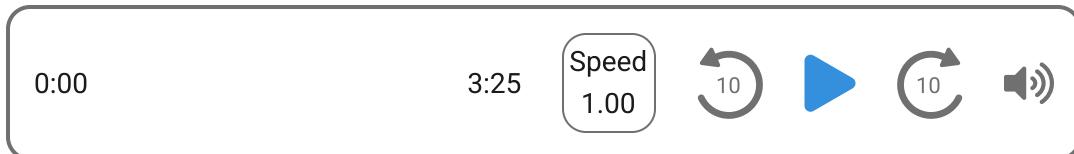
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DePauw to host retrospective of New York-to-Indianapolis artist Samuel Vázquez

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Samuel Vázquez was 13 years old when he started to “style write”—his preferred term for painting graffiti—in New York City.

He practiced graffiti art and breakdancing, two pillars of hip-hop culture, in 1983. It was a big year for the culture’s music, with Run-DMC and the Beastie Boys

issuing their debut singles and Whodini releasing its debut album.

Artist Samuel Vázquez graduated from Indiana University’s Herron School of Art and Design in 2010. (Photo provided by the artist)

“It was what the young people were doing at the time,” said Vázquez, who lived in Puerto Rico before his family moved to East Harlem. “People ask me, ‘Did you ever think the music and graffiti and all this stuff would become a multibillion-dollar industry?’ I say, ‘No, because when you’re in the moment you’re not thinking in a future sense.’ That’s why it was so dynamic, because it was still very pure.”

Vázquez turned his street art beginnings into a fine art career, studying at Indiana University’s Herron School of Art and Design along the way.

On Jan. 26, his retrospective exhibition “Poetic Reflection” will open a five-month run at [i DePauw University’s Peeler Art Center](#) in Greencastle. The show will include paintings made from 2011 to 2025, photographs made from 1979 to 2019 and a new installation.

Although his earlier paintings on canvas featured spray paint and markers, Vázquez now specializes in multitextured décollage works that incorporate typography, photographs and advertising.

“In my earlier work, I see it as when the subways were moving so fast that the pieces became a blur,” he said. “I always focused on the motion of the subways. Where I’m at now is the static wall. Now you have all these paste-ups on walls and kids writing on walls. That became the evolution.”

Vázquez said his work has become increasingly informed by a notion of community. He cites a Creative Renewal Arts Fellowship he earned from Indy Arts Council in 2017 for influencing this approach.

“My experience was to go back to New York to reconnect with my roots,” he said. “I visited subway yards, ‘Rock Steady Park’ and Crotona Park—places where early hip-hop and graffiti flourished.”

Vázquez said he befriended Al Diaz, the partner of a teenage Jean-Michel Basquiat in 1970s graffiti duo SAMO©, and prolific tagger Eddie “Snake 1” Rodriguez.

“I realized, ‘My work just didn’t happen to come out of nowhere. There’s something deeper than that,’ he said.

Vázquez now spends part of each year in New York and part of each year in Indianapolis, which he credits for providing a relaxed pace conducive to making art.

“What I get from Indianapolis is the space to really focus,” he said. “You know, New York can have a lot of distractions. I enjoy them both, but Indianapolis affords that time and space.”

On Feb. 17, Vázquez will participate in a Peeler Art Center artist talk at 4:30 p.m., which will be followed by a reception in the facility’s upper level gallery. Admission is free and open to the public.

‘Samuel E. Vázquez: Poetic Reflection’

- **When:** Jan. 26 to June 24
- **Where:** Richard E. Peeler Art Center, DePauw University, Greencastle
- **Admission:** Free
- **Info:** Visit depauw.edu.



“Expelled Lines Fair Safe On The Brightest Satellites” is a 2012 work of acrylic, spray enamel and latex paint by Samuel Vázquez. (Image provided by DePauw University)

About the author

Dave Lindquist [✉](#)

Lindquist joined IBJ in October 2021 after working as a reporter, copy editor and page designer at newspapers in Indiana, Illinois and New York since 1991. He's also host of "The Beat with Dave Lindquist" on WTTS. He lives in Indianapolis, and when he's not working, he enjoys getting outside with his wife, teenage son and their Aussiedoodle puppy.

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