

# Bringing joy to the world

*Diagnosed with autism at age 4, freshman Jackson Sutton reads dozens of languages, follows passion for the visual arts*



Over the years Sutton has developed his own identity as an artist, including creating his own style he calls Mexican Modern Art. "I've been deeply inspired by Latin American art," Sutton said. This piece, titled "Floating off into the World" or "The Moon Sees Me" (2013) is an example of the Mexican Modern style. Illustration courtesy of Rene Craft.

**CHARLIE HOLDEN**  
staff reporter

Not everyone gets a chance to have their artwork featured in three shows before their 15th birthday. Not everyone composes their first song at age 3. Not everyone can write and understand dozens of languages or attempt to create their own. Not everyone can do all of those things, but then again, not everyone is Jackson Sutton.

Sutton, a freshman, was diagnosed with autism at age 4, and although it is easy to focus on the obstacles that accompany living with autism, Sutton sees his differences as an

asset not a handicap.

"It feels good [to have autism]," Sutton said. "It makes me a great artist."

Sutton's mother, Rene Craft, agrees. "Jackson just sees things very, very differently than the rest of us," Craft said. "He sees beauty and joy where others might not. He sees happiness in a street scene, he sees joy in a children's birthday party, and he would

come home and draw those images in his personal style."

He has been seeing things and then drawing them as they are in his imagination—or his "EyeTV," as he calls it—long before he could speak.

"Jackson began drawing obsessively at 18 months old," Craft said. "Once he could communicate verbally at age 5, he was able to tell

him a linguistic savant. Jackson has taught himself pieces of hundreds of languages. He likes to create new languages and spends the majority of his time on linguistics doing a project he calls, "Language Blending."

To encourage Sutton's many projects as well as to raise social awareness about autism, Craft has created a website telling her son's story and promoting his artwork.

"By publishing Jackson's story and our family's efforts online, we hoped to reach more families with information about autism and provide some window into the mind of one child who had autism," Craft said.

"Jackson was active in reading the [blog] pages I wrote and giving me ideas. He is the one that said, 'The autistic brain is very powerful.' He wanted more people to know about autism and to help people with autism get more attention."

Craft has also set up an online store to sell prints, canvases, mugs and other products adorned with pieces by Sutton. All proceeds from the sales go towards Sutton's special needs fund, which helps cover medical expenses, enabling Sutton to reach his goals of becoming a working artist.

"I do not want to give the impression that guiding someone with autism through life is easy, cheap or involves quick fixes. It has been more than 11 years of non-stop work as well as Jackson's natural intellectual gifts that yielded the progress, in my opinion."

Sutton has many unique strengths, some of which come in the form of talent and intellect, and others that are a testament to his positive character.

"I think [Jackson's greatest strength] is his joy. He is so joyful and the work reflects that. In this world, at this time, what do we all need more of? Joy."

**"I feel proud of who I am."**

*-Jackson Sutton*



us how he was experiencing what most of us call reality: a wonderful place of beauty that he named Jackson's EyeTV, that he alone could see inside his mind."

Although it is Sutton's dream to be a "big artist," his first passion was language, specifically foreign languages.

"[In preschool] Jackson was still unable to speak English outside of basic one- or two-word commands, but he would pantomime or scream 'KOREA' over and over again when we visited the public library until I figured out that he wanted me to check out children's books in Korean," Craft said.

"I was so desperate to get him to speak, I bought him the Putumayo CD, *Asian Dreamland*. He loved that CD and listened to it over and over again, and that was the beginning of something wonderful for him."

For the past three years Sutton has placed first in the Austin Regional Japanese Language Speech Contest and will move on to compete at the state level at Rice University in March.

"Jackson can speak Japanese with more fluidity than he can speak English," Craft said. "His neurologist calls

Go check out Jackson's website at [www.jacksonseyetv.com](http://www.jacksonseyetv.com)

Sutton studies in his Japanese II class, sketchbook close at hand. In the background is a piece of sheet music that Sutton wrote when he was only 3 years old. "Jackson describes that he can see music, and I believe him," Craft said. "He sees the song, he sees the notes in the air. This is how he's described it to me." Photo by Stephany Serna and sheet music courtesy of Rene Craft.