

## LOCAL SPOTLIGHT

# JIMIYO

By Jennifer Kiilerich

Keep an eye on Jimi Benedict, the creator of Jimiyo T-shirts. Though he's humble and unassuming in person, this local designer's work is anything but ordinary. His ambitions aren't too shabby, either: He'd like to be able to create a business, he says, "where not only could I use my craft for sustaining a livelihood, but to be able to provide society and other artists

a livelihood as well." It's a lofty goal, but Jimi's screen-printed and hand-decorated shirts just might take him there. The tees are whimsical and artistic, not to mention super-soft and comfy to boot — like your favorite worn-in old shirt, but infinitely more sleek and stylish.

Jimi's best-selling tees feature sketches of birds and animals, which also happen to be some of his favorite subjects. He likes to add a little unexpected edginess to spice things up, a trait evident on a cat-adorned tee that, upon closer inspection, depicts one cat looking tipsy after hitting the bottle, and another wearing a spiked wrist cuff and skull necklace. His most recent creation, which is bejeweled and decorated with silver appliques, takes the T-shirt to a whole new level of sophistication.

"There are a lot of T-shirts out there that I feel like are generic," Jimi says. "I like to have my work look more artful. And when people feel good when they wear it, that's kind of nice."

His designs are inspired to some degree by ornately wrought tattoos and by the Art Nouveau movement, but mostly his images start life as pencil sketches and doodles. "Since I want to be a good artist, I feel like I have to practice every day. A lot of it doesn't come from outside inspiration — it's more of just doing the job," he says. Jimi's method also involves liberating himself from distractions. He doesn't own a TV, and recently cancelled his Internet service, "just to see if I could." So far, he seems to be doing fine without either.

Like many artists, Jimi discovered his passion only after trying several other career paths. He briefly studied engineering, but found himself using the machinery to create figures of people and characters, so he went on to graduate from MTSU with a degree in mass communications and an emphasis on digital animation.

After an unsuccessful attempt to find a job in digital animation, Jimi reluctantly took a sales position at Dell Computers. He quit two years later, and began aggressively sending out his work online. His efforts paid off when Active Creations, a creative services company that makes shirts and hats, among other items, saw his work on the Web and offered him a job. He's now the company's art director, creating his own shirts in his spare time. "An art job was something that was unfathomable to me a few years ago," he says.

So what's next for Jimi? "Ideally, a small part of me is hoping that one day maybe I would meet a business-minded woman at a craft show and we can combine forces and rule the world," he says with a grin.

For now, Jimi primarily sells his designs at Twist Gallery, an art gallery-meets-boutique downtown in the Arcade. His T-shirts fit right in with the surrounding paintings and art installations. You can also check out his designs online at [www.jimiyo.com](http://www.jimiyo.com).



Jimi favors birds and flowers in his custom T-shirt designs.



Of course, he doesn't just do girly stuff....