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Romero Britto

Art Superstar



Romero Britto

The wildly successful Romero Britto (www.britto.com) is known worldwide for his brightly-colored artwork that incorporates elements of Pop Art and Cubism. His cleverly-designed, cheerful images appeal to a wide range of people and have made the 47-year-old artist an international art star. Britto's work can be found in prominent collections ranging from Elton John and Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, to King Juan Carlos I and Queen Sofia of Spain, to the Louvre in Paris. Patrons adore his work so much, in fact, that according to the *New York Times*,¹ Britto brings in almost \$12 million annually with his art, an impressive feat for an artist who came from humble beginnings.

Born in Recife, Brazil, Britto was one of nine children raised by a single mother. Although he was always interested in art, Britto also excelled in academics. He decided to pursue law school, aspiring to someday become an ambassador for Brazil. However, after spending a short time in law school, Britto's passion for his art overwhelmed him. Following a year of backpacking through Europe in 1986, Britto moved to Miami, determined to make his way as an artist. When he arrived, he had no formal training and very few resources, yet he persisted, creating his paintings on newspaper and cardboard.

Britto's big break came in 1989. A "prominent Swedish family" that Britto met during his travels in Europe had recommended his artwork to Michel Roux, the importer of Absolut Vodka.² Britto was commissioned by Absolut Vodka to illustrate an advertisement for their national print campaign, joining the ranks of such prestigious artists as Andy Warhol and Keith Haring, and gaining national recognition.

Since then, Britto has been a fixture of the South Florida social scene. His artwork can now be seen all over Miami and throughout the world. His paintings and sculptures are currently carried in 100 galleries on five continents. His licensed art has appeared on more than 30 commercial products, and he has part-

nered with a range of corporations, including Disney, Pepsi, Movado, Evian and Cirque du Soleil. Britto has also had solo shows in numerous museums around the world including the Museum of Contemporary Art in Shanghai and the Louvre, and his work can be found in 15 permanent museum collections.

Throughout his career, Britto has also donated artwork to hundreds of causes. His unflagging devotion to children's charities had led him to work with such organizations as Best Buddies International, the Andre Agassi Foundation, the World Economic and Development Fund, St. Jude's Hospital, the Governor's Family Literacy Initiative and the Keep the Memory Alive Foundation. In 2007, he established the Britto Foundation.

Art Calendar: Your artwork is full of optimism and a very innocent joy that appeals to children of all ages. During your childhood, were you interested in becoming an artist?

Romero Britto: As a child, I loved drawing just for myself. I was interested in art, but I never thought about the meaning of being an artist. Basically, when you're a kid, you just like to have fun. That's the beauty of being a kid. And when you grow up you continue to do it. Like any kid who acts up or tries to be funny, and then ends up turning into an actor or entertainer later on. I'm not



There's No Place like Home by Romero Britto. 2008, acrylic on canvas, 40" x 40".

© Copyright Romero Britto. Used by permission of the artist.

comparing myself to Spielberg, but I've read stories about him where he would do all this acting at home for his mom, but she didn't know that in the future he would become such an amazing creative man. I never thought I'd be creating art as a profession — as a way of surviving.

AC: Why did you move to Miami in 1987?

RB: Moving to Miami was not really a decision. It just happened. At the time, a friend of mine was attending the University of Miami. He suggested that I get a flight and come over, and from there we'd fly to New York and then to Europe. But I ended up falling in love with Miami and the United States and staying here for 23 years

There is a great energy in Miami. I love living in the United States because I believe that this country is a model for the future of the world, where all kinds of people live next each other and can do well for themselves

AC: You've now been an established artist for almost two decades. What were the early years of your art career like?

RB: In the early days, it was very, very challenging. Being an artist isn't something that everyone is doing out there. I did all kinds of odd jobs while making my art. I washed cars, I cut grass, I worked in restaurants. I would make my art whenever I could. I would paint during the day and sometimes during the night. Always

when I came back to my place at the end of the day, I was working on my art. Eventually, I got to a point where I was able to not do anything else except my art, as I do today — a hundred percent of my work is my art. It was a long road, but I knew I had a long road ahead of me.

AC: Your studio has currently expanded to the point that you have a gallery operation complete with an in-house curator, a printing arm that produces your reproductions and Shop Britto for collectibles. When did you feel the need to expand your business into these areas and hire more employees? When did you feel the need to offer more products other than original artwork?

RB: My art is available to all because I want everyone to enjoy it. The more people who wanted to buy my work and the more demand for my art, the more I'm ready to give. I want to share my work and give as many people as possible the experience of living with a piece of art, even if that piece of art is an art print and not necessarily an original. (Expanding my business) was a natural process. It didn't happen in the space from one day to another. It was very organic. I hired one person and then two more, and so on to 20, 30, 40, 50 employees. At this point, I have almost 80 people working for me. I believe you cannot do this on your own. You need all these people around you to help you and support you. London, Singapore, Venice, Geneva — you name a place, and there is a gallery there selling my work. In order to supply my galleries, I need to have people to help me. In the past, there were artists who had large amounts of apprentices and assistants. I'm not scared to work with people.

AC: How did you build up your collector base?

RB: I have a huge amount of supporters around the world in terms of people who collect my work and love what I do. Galleries han-

dle my work. I have galleries in cultural centers — New York, Paris, London, Frankfurt, Geneva, Tokyo, etc. The galleries are all over. There are people who travel and who can afford to go around the world. The people who buy my work are the people who travel to these cities to see what the galleries are showing. In Miami, I have my place in Miami Beach, and I have a lot of people who buy the work from my studio. Recently, I was invited to speak about my art in Abu Dhabi by the royal family. (After the event), the sheik and the queen of Abu Dhabi bought 20 of my pieces. That's how it is. I was invited to paint them, and the rest happened in a very organic process. It's a very normal way of doing business.

AC: You have many repeat collectors of your artwork. Now that you're well established, both nationally and internationally, in what ways do you make your long-term collectors feel special?

RB: They're not only collectors; they're friends. Those people who collect my art, they are bringing a part of my experience into their homes. I definitely feel that they become friends of mine. I don't get to meet everyone who collects my work, but the ones I do meet, I treat them very well, and I've been treated very well. I've had amazing experiences because of my collectors who provide me with so many opportunities. It's not just about seeing them as a collector, but seeing them as a friend and a supporter because they're someone who loves what I do.

AC: Many of your collectors call your work "addictive." What are the qualities of your art that encourages people to keep acquiring them?

RB: My work is direct and simple. Happiness is what I want to express in my art. When I'm (creating my art), it's almost like therapy for me. It's positive. I would hope that every time somebody looks at my work they smile, they feel a good energy and they get excited. If that happens, then it's an amazing thing. Through my art, I try to express the things I would like to personally experience on a daily basis, such as positive energy and joy. I wake up every morning with the goal of being a source of hope and inspiration for others. I want to feel good and I hope that this is reflected in my art.

AC: What does it mean for you to have your work included in an exhibition at the Louvre?

RB: It was such an amazing accomplishment. I remember the first time I went to Paris and visiting the Louvre. To be able to come back and see my art in that building — in a shrine made to the art of the world — was unbelievable.

AC: You've donated hundreds of works to charity auctions, and you are involved with many organizations. Why is giving back to the community so important to you?

RB: I think it is very important, not only for an artist, but for everyone living in a society with so much, to be giving and helping and somehow adding to people's lives. I've been given so many opportunities, why not share that? I think it's an incredible experience to be sharing. I love doing it. I wish I could do more.



© Copyright Romero Britto. Used by permission of the artist.

Garden Butterfly by Romero Britto, 2009, Enamel on aluminum, 9' x 7' x 2'.



Sweetheart by Romero Britto. 2009, acrylic on canvas, 30" x 40".

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AC: Tell me about the Britto Foundation. When and why did you found it, and what is its mission?

RB: In 2007. I was giving a lot of work to charities, but it was not very organized. I wanted to do it in a more organized way so I created the foundation. The mission is to help kids, and the Britto Foundation is mostly focused on education. When you give kids a better education, it's going to open up their eyes so when other opportunities come they'll make the right move. The foundation is a long-term thing because I definitely want all my images — all the art that I've done over the years, and I will do more — I want the rights to my images to go to the foundation so it will be able to keep raising funds and be able to keep helping to ensure in the future that a young artist will have the opportunity to succeed with their talent along with support from the foundation. That's my life goal.

AC: What projects are you currently working on?

RB: I'm working on the Miami Dolphins' (Land Shark) Stadium, which will be completed in three years. Currently, I'm also creating a sculpture for the Time Warner building in New York. I'm heading up to my show in Singapore on the 23rd and 24th of (September 2009). Afterwards, on September 25th, I'll be doing something

with Andre Agassi. (Later in the year) I'm going to show work for a show in London about the royal family, also projects in Brazil and a sculpture for a park in Prague. There's also licensing products like books and watches I have a lot of stuff going on.

AC: At this point in your career, what are your goals with your art?

RB: In terms of history, history makes itself. You can't predict history. I take my life and my career goals as they come. I'm going where life takes me. I've been very lucky in that. When a work leaves my studio, it has a whole new journey as a painting. For my collectors, my brand and for me as an artist, it's a whole new journey. I have my art in the hands of the most incredible people in the world. AC

From January 15 to February 5, 2010, Florida Gulf Coast University will host "Romero Britto: A Selective Retrospective." The exhibition will survey the artist's career comprehensively. Artwork on display will include Britto's early paintings, sketches and drawings, as well as his most current paintings, silkscreens and sculpture. For more information, visit <http://artgallery.fgu.edu/>.

Williams, Alex. "In Miami, Art Without Angst," New York Times (February 4, 2007).
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