

ROMERO BRITTO

An Agent of Positive Change & Founder of The Happy Art Movement

By Ava Roosevelt

At an invitation-only dinner hosted by Citi Private Bank, at Miami's Art Basel in 2008, seated to my right, casually attired and sporting a spirited coiffure, was the artist Romero Britto himself. I had no idea who he was, but figured he must have been someone important enough to be there. When Romero asked, "May I paint your car?"- I was doubtful whether my dinner partner was of sound mind. To be polite, I suggested "Why not paint me instead?"

Charmed by this exotic stranger, my curiosity persisted. Peter Scaturro, our host, made me blush. In an embarrassing moment, I learned that Romero is an internationally renowned artist who has created an iconic visual language of happiness, fun, love and hope that's a movement all on its own, while inspiring millions of people worldwide.

Romero reached out to me a few days later and we set a date. He arrived at my home in Palm Beach, flanked by a 'beautiful entourage,' bearing the gift of an autographed heart, which to this day remains one of my most prized possessions. During his visit, the birth of my portrait was conceived. "How long..." I asked. "Ready in a year," Romero answered.

And just like that, I had joined the elite members of the royal families, renowned artists and celebrities whom Romero has painted and is undoubtedly most famous for. I am proud of Romero's generous gift, but most importantly I am incredibly grateful for our friendship, which blossomed as a result.



Ava Roosevelt and Romero Britto
Photographer Neil London



Romero Britto

Q & A

Ava:

Brazilian-born and Miami-made, you are considered one of the most famous and celebrated living visual artists on the globe. Legend has it, you started painting on the sidewalks of Sao Paulo; is this true? How old were you? What or who prompted your love for creating?

Romero:

I was born in Brazil, but I started showing my work in the streets of Miami. In Brazil I did not live in Sao Paulo, no; I lived in a small town by the name of Recife. It really was not what or who prompted my love of creating, drawing and making art. Like most children, I always loved it. As you grow older, the issues and challenges affect your imagination because of so many no's. I was told there were so many things to be afraid of, so many things my parents feared. Most people who are fearful of making mistakes, stop being creative. As a child I knew I enjoyed creating. As I grew older, I realized it was my calling, to be an artist and create images of happiness and hope.

Ava:

Your appreciation of the masters, including Pablo Picasso, Henry Matisse, Andy Warhol, Keith Haring and Roy Lichtenstein, influenced you to create a completely new artistic style by using vibrant, bold and colorful patterns to reflect an optimistic view of the world around you. As an artist, and personally, how do you deal with the negative aspects of life in 2023?

Romero:

Well, the negativity and struggles have been around for a very long time, except now, the explosion of social media made it more evident, more in our face. Just open your phone, and you will see everything. I think that is the challenge. The more we are connected, the more we are aware of it. Often, negativity becomes a reality. It is sad because we are so ahead with so many things, but it looks like we are so behind. I suggest people believe that things are going to get better and have hope. Otherwise, if you get sucked into the negativity and what the media puts out there, you're going to get static, will get frozen in a moment in time because you're going to think everything is going to be over. So, you need to keep moving forward, doing your part. All of us need to do our part, knowing it's worth it.

Ava:

Your work has been exhibited in the most prestigious galleries and museums in over 120 countries, including the Louvre. You were the first living visual artist to present your work at the Soumaya Museum. Which exhibit are you most proud of that gave you the most joy?

Romero:

I am so happy that I have shown my work in Brazil at The National Museum of Art, because I am from Brazil, and it is so difficult as a Brazilian artist to get praise and acceptance from your own people. Finally, I did have a show there. It is amazing for me when I think and remember that the exhibit was actually of my art.

Ava:

Your 60,000 sq. ft. studio in Miami has already hosted dignitaries, celebrities, innovators and art patrons from all over the globe. Tell us what else motivated you to create The Britto Palace?

Romero:

The Britto Palace is like a combination of so many years of work because I had my first, second, third, fourth studio and now we are in the Britto Palace. It has been a collaboration by lots of people that have helped me to shape this place, especially Dr. Lucas Vidal, CEO of Britto.

Ava:

The list of your collectors is extraordinary and includes: HM the late Queen Elizabeth II, HM King Charles, HM Queen Silvia, Tim Cook, Sir Elton John, Anna Wintour, Richard Branson, Carlos Slim, Alice Walton, Wyatt Koch, Muhtar Kent, Ramon Laguarta, Jim Clerkin, Jean-Claude Biver, Alan G. Hassenfeld, Leonardo DiCaprio, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Sylvester Stallone, Martin Scorsese, HRH Princess Madeleine, HM King Juan Carlos I, Tom Brady, Gisele Bündchen, Natalia Vodianova, Paulo Coelho, Pelé, Neymar Jr., Cristiano Ronaldo, Andre Agassi, Roger Federer, Michael Jordan, Kris Jenner, Kim Kardashian, DJ Khaled, Justin Bieber, Marc Anthony, Shakira, Michael Jackson, Gloria and Emilio Estefan, Julio Iglesias, Oprah Winfrey, Sir Evelyn Rothschild, Eileen Guggenheim, Leonard Lauder, Steve Wozniak, Nobu Matsuhisa, Wolfgang Puck, Emeril Lagasse, Bobby Flay, Donatella Versace, Stefano Gabbana, Domenico Dolce and Ava Roosevelt! Who was the most, or can you tell us, the least fun, to paint?

Romero:

Oh, my goodness. Everybody that I decided to paint is someone that I have admiration for, that did something special for the world, our community and each of them has their own unique story. I always have fun with everything I do.

Ava:

You're considered to be the most licensed artist in history. How do you protect your brand from becoming devalued?

Romero:

Yes, I've got many licenses. CNN conducted research on me because of this and did a story on my work. I've worked with incredible organizations, great brands from Absolut Vodka, Evian, Dolce & Gabbana, Hublot, Disney, Bentley and Coca-Cola. I wanted to share my work with millions of people who otherwise would not have been exposed to my art. If it were not for so many of these amazing projects that I've done over the years, those in remote parts of the world wouldn't have been able to experience my art.

Ava:

You are a frequent speaker at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, and an activist for more than 250 charitable organizations. Which organization inspired you and benefited most from your involvement?

Romero:

I love to go out there and speak at universities and colleges, and of course, it is a great honor to be a speaker at the World Economic Forum. I have done it several times. I always have fun when I speak to the students in a school. Getting involved in the education system inspires me. It is always so much fun, I love their questions, and I learn so much.

Ava:

You were quoted to say, "Art is too important not to share," and that you have a role as an agent of positive change. What change are you specifically referring to?

Romero:

When someone gets inspired by a piece of art, they are touched profoundly, in their soul. A piece of art becomes an instrument of changing someone's perception. Then you start thinking and doing things differently, and that's very special. That is the greatest hope of any artist, that his work can make people think better, live better, and enjoy more out of life.

Ava:

As an artist, in years to come, what would you like to be most remembered for? Your Legacy of Hope? Please tell us what means the most to you in life today?

Romero:

I hope that every time someone thinks about my art, they think about the art of happiness, the art that brings joy to people's eyes, the art that is music for people's soul. It is what brings meaning to life.



Ava Roosevelt and Romero Britto
image by Christopher M. Twardy

