

NOEL | Artist | Activist | Visionary | *Taking the Art World by Storm*

By George Neary, Exclusively for AMBIENTE



Cover photo by Keith Douglas

From his humble beginnings in Cuba, and after migrating to Costa Rica and then the U.S, his career flourished - first as a professional ballet dancer and later as a painter. For the last 20 years, Noel has accomplished a lot as an Artist. International Artist Noel Suarez – or simply known as NOEL, was recently featured in the International Art Expo at the *Carrousel* of the Louvre Museum in Paris, and shows no signs of slowing down in his quest to take the international Art world by storm.

George Neary | The community is just coming off the first and fabulous Gay Pride event in Miami Beach-- you were all over it attending the Chamber event, the Miami Design Preservation League exhibit, the parade on Ocean Drive and at the Miami-Dade Gay Chamber's booth. Why?

Noel | My 2009 One Man Show was more of a community event this year, with The Miami Gay Chamber of Commerce, the City of Miami Beach, and the official opening of Miami Beach's Gay Pride. It was a very nice opening at The Shore Club Hotel, attended by over 400 people. We unveiled three very special paintings I created that evening. First the City of Miami Beach 25/7 Tourism Campaign with our Mayor (and my dear friend) Matti Bower. The second one was the Image that will represent the Miami Dade Gay Chamber of Commerce, and the third one was the painting I created for the main Sponsor of the event; OOKS Professional Hardware, titled, The Face of OOKS. Steve Berenson the President of OOKS unveiled the painting with me. Steve and OOKS are major sponsors of the Arts, and supporters of our community. My 2009 Collection was very well received and the feedback from everybody was amazing. It was a whole new body of work inspired by my history of dance, new paintings of City Scape, and the new mixed media drawings.

GN | What is your history?

N | I went to the National School of Arts in Havana, to study ballet. Then I joined the company and toured the world with the Alonso's. It was an amazing way to grow up, I learned a lot and worked with the best the World of Dance had to offer in those days...an experience that I will never trade for anything in the World. Then in early 1981, exactly 2 months after the

Marliff closed; I left Cuba with a visa for Costa Rica. There I danced with the National Company of Dance as a principal dancer, a teacher for the company, and also teaching in the National School of Dance. After 9 months there, it was time to leave for my next stop, Miami, where my family was waiting for me. In Miami, I worked with Ballet Concerto & Dance Miami for less than a year. Boston Ballet came to Miami to perform Don Quixote with Rudolph Nureyev, I audition for them and I was accepted to join them, so I packed my bags and left to Boston. I danced with them for over a year, and then with New England Dinosaur Dance Company, a wonderful contemporary ballet company. Then New York was the next stop, where I had the fortune to have Mr. David Howard as my Ballet Master, and had opportunity to work with Joffrey Ballet. Just a couple of years later (right before my 30th b-day) my right knee gave up and that was the end of my ballet career. Painting was always a necessary hobby for me, and an outlet from dancing, and actually because of it I had the chance to designing sets and costumes for the companies I worked with. After retiring from Dance, somehow, I transferred painting from a hobby to a necessity, and painting became my full-time focus. I closed my number one passion, dance, and painting became my new priority.

GN | What were you painting, and where was your first exhibit?

N | It was very Art Deco paintings inspired on illustration, very theatrical, executed in pen, ink and acrylics, very different from what I'm doing today. My first show was in Provincetown, Mass, in 1986 at Ricky's Republic gallery.

GN | Did you sell?

N | All 25 pieces were sold on opening night. Maybe my friends who had been telling me for years how good I was as a painter, were right. When my first show was over, I felt validated knowing that everything was sold...that people truly appreciated my second talent.

GN | Then what?

N | More shows in Boston, and I opened my studio/gallery in Boston's South End, at the same time I was approached to do a painting for a major AIDS benefit. The painting "We Shall Overcome" made such an impact that sold at the auction for \$6,000.00, the most expensive painting I sold then so far was \$750.00...a major shock for me, and also a pleasure and joy that my work generated \$6,000.00 for AIDS at a time that was very much needed, this happened in 1987. After this in less than a year, I had a huge following in Boston. I transitioned from dance to painting, all unplanned and successfully.

I was in Boston for 9 years and began to travel to Miami Beach for Art Deco Weekend. I convened visiting my family with Art Deco Weekend. In 1987 I met with this lady named Matti Bower, that was the director and organizer of Art Deco Weekend back then, and she encouraged me to take a booth. I did, and after two other Art Deco Weekends, I made the decision to move to Miami Beach. The response to my work was overwhelming. The acceptance of my works and the sales were so much more than I had ever experienced before...I knew I had to move here. Plus, I was over the cold weather.



"City Scape II"



"Mis 3 Gracias"



"Rara Avis"

In 1990 I made my final move (it took 3 trips and 7 months) to Miami Beach for good. All those years Matti Bower, our current mayor, took me under her wing and introduced me Barbara Capitman, founder of the Miami Design Preservation League (MDPL)- that organized an exhibit for me at the Cardozo Hotel. My name and the work really spread around fast, and I decided to open my studio/gallery on Lincoln Road.

GN | How were they received?

N | Extremely well...we had a beautiful space at the Lincoln Center, a huge space 5,000 sq. ft. The Road was an amazing place, full of artists and creative people. Carlos Betancourt, Carlos Alvez, Ali, Tony Chimento, and the very different South Florida Art Center...a smaller and simpler organization. We were the pioneers of Lincoln Road, of Miami Beach, and all of us are still here enjoying wonderful careers.

GN | What part does being gay have in your creative process?

N | I don't believe creativity has anything to do with sexuality. Lots of creative people are straight also...creativity is a gift. I think the media, history, and people in general, pay more attention to gay people in the creative field, because being gay allows you to go further on certain subjects, allows you to push the envelope further. To me creativity has no genre.

South (Miami) Beach in the early years was Fabulous!

The beach was just ours, it was one little happy family. It was an underground success, not internationally known, no media. We were creating the entire scene; it was just us... I was the first Wire cover story by Andrew Delaplaine. I have the most Wire cover stories, 13 of them. We always waited for the Wire to find out what happened in our special little island. Andrew really covered the pioneers. Then Luis Canales brought the New Yorkers to see what we were doing down here...and the fun and the creativity went on, and without knowing it, we put Miami Beach on the map and created a great deal of media attention.

GN | What was your creative process during that time?

N | It was all around us, we were feeding off each other...it was wonderful. For me it's still pretty much the same, I kept that feeling deep within me. But creativity is always evolving. Creativity gets ahead of me, the creative process takes place in the sub-conscious.

GN | Do you think your work is erotic?

N | My work is sensual; sensuality goes further than erotica. Let the viewer go where they want to go. Also, because of my theatrical background, I can create a persona, a character and they can show you what I want them to show you with a look of the eye a turn of the head...go in and travel within the painting. I want the viewer to have a relationship with my painting. Some people go all the way, some go halfway, and others choose to stay outside the painting. Art is about the person viewing the art, not about the artist creating it...that is a whole other moment that ends at the moment the artist completes the work.

GN | I understand that you had become a philanthropist through your work

N | I don't consider myself one, for me a philanthropist is the person that gives actual money to charities. From the beginning of my career to present, my work has generated over \$300,000.00 for different charities/organizations Nationwide, especially for AIDS, so I guess that makes me one. I do love the fact that is my work, my talent, what raises the money for the charities. I'm a big believer on giving back, and since the Universe has given me so much and I grow up in a family of givers, giving is a way of life for me...something that gives me a lot of pleasure.

GN | What about the future?

N | Three years ago, I signed with Global Fine Art, the wonderful Art agent that represents a very impressive stable of artists, from the Masters to very established contemporary artists, on the Luxury Liners of Princess, Cunard, P & O and Holland America. For the last 3 years, I've been traveling the world and doing amazing exhibits, meeting great people, galleries and collectors.

GN | Where?

N | Portugal, Gibraltar, Sevilla, Alicante, Madrid, Barcelona, Paris, Monaco, Cannes, Marseille, Florence, Rome, Tuscany, Naples, Sicily, Amalfi Coast, London, Greece, Istanbul, South and Central America, and many others.

GN | How is this different?

N | Been in over 20 countries, more than 60 cities in 3 years, it allows me to grow artistically. Paris, Rome & Florence alone, are a must for an artist to experience. Walking museums-- surrounded by the Masters, meeting new people. Besides this, I am in the company of these contemporary masters the like of Alexandra Nechita, Martiros, Howard Bherens, Peter Max, John Kelly, Pino, and many others. A highlight for me was in June of 2007 when I had my Solo Exhibit on the Queen Mary 2 from New York City to London, a truly amazing experience.

GN | What do you see for the beach?

N | I hope the beach gains back a little bit of the culture and the creativity that it lost. The Beach will never be again what it was, that time is over, it is part of evolution. But the Beach needs back its galleries, artists, unique shops, a bit of what made it a very special and unique place.

GN | How did you keep yourself grounded?

N | A true artist doesn't let success go to his head. A true artist is secure and comfortable with himself and is truly never 100 % aware of how good he/she really is, is not aware of how talented one is. If the artist is too aware and too involved in what comes with the success and the hype of the career, then that artist is no longer in the moment, is no longer in the creative process.

GN | After all you have accomplished how are you so firmly grounded and secure?

N | Surely it is due in part to my family and how I grew up. A family of artists, dancers'/performers/ singers/ all around celebrities/well-known people. They all taught me that being humble is part of being a true artist, after all, our success is marked by the acceptance of the people, the audience. I don't ever take the gifts that the universe had given me for granted.

GN | And the latest on you...

N | On April 26th, I left for my Solo Exhibit on the Crown Princess to Portugal and Barcelona. This was my fifth time crossing the Atlantic Ocean, and as always, an amazing experience. The new collection was very well received by all, a wonderful success, specially the new Mixed Media Drawings...I'm very pleased.

On May 10th, I arrived in my favorite city...Barcelona, this city is always a very nice experience and lots of fun, and I feel at home here...after all my grandmother from my father's side, was born here. This time I came to Barcelona to meet with the directors of Crisolart Gallery about the exhibits scheduled for Summer and Fall of 2009. I also had the chance to meet others in the Barcelona art scene, which allowed me to generate great new contacts and discover a new gallery (Artevistas) in the best location of *El Barrio Gótico*, that is ready to start working with me as soon as late July 09.



Left - Noel in Lisboa's Alfama, on his Mediterranean's exhibits. Right - With Collectors at the Louvre's Carrousel Vernissage, and at a friend in Paris.

While talking to the directors of Crisolart Gallery about the exhibits and art fairs planned in other cities around Europe and Asia, they informed me of very exciting and unexpected news. They were accepted to participate at the prestigious Art Exhibit at the Carrousel of The Louvre Museum from June 5th to the 7th, and they included me as one of the artists that they were taking to Paris. A "TRUE and AMAZING" opportunity, and one that I always dream of. The artists that they selected for this Louvre Carrousel Art Exhibit, are all very well-known and established in Europe and Barcelona.

One of them happens to be Gaudi's grandson (also an amazing artist) so I'm very pleased, honored and exited that they included me on this exhibit. As a result, my work was well received by the Paris audience and art connoisseurs, and now two galleries in Paris, and one in San Juan, Puerto Rico, will be representing me. My goal of increasing my international representation is being achieved. Exhibits are now scheduled for summer and fall of 2009 in Barcelona, Paris, and San Juan, Puerto Rico.



During one of the Art Demonstrations taking place at the Atrium of Emerald Princess, during the Mediterranean exhibits with Global Fine Arts.

I want to give special thanks to Steve and Diane Berenson, and The OOKS Fine Art Hardware Company, not only for being the main sponsors of my April 15th Miami Beach exhibit at The Shore Club, but also for making it possible for me to be part of The Louvre's Carrousel Exhibit. They are wonderful true supporters of the arts. Also want to thank you and Herb Sosa for this wonderful Ambiente interview.

Copyright 2009 | [Ambiente](#).

[Do not reproduce without prior authorization.](#)