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Noel Flexes his Artistic Muscles

Miami Artist Unveils First Sculptures March 8

By Mary Damiano



Miami artist Noel tries his hand at sculpting

Miami artist Noel calls me eight days before the opening of his new one-man show, his first in two years. We've been trying to get together to talk about his sculpture, which marks a new chapter in his career, but we've been trapped in a game of phone tag.

When we finally talk that afternoon, he's at sea, on a weeklong RSVP cruise. Could it be that he's slacking the week before his big opening? That this prolific artist, who created 40 paintings last year alone, just needed to get away from it all for a little R&R? Of course not. The cruise is a working vacation. While onboard, Noel was giving art demonstrations, exhibiting his work in the ship's gallery, unveiling his new work in a special event, and doing several interviews, this one included.

Noel is always working, creating. And he wouldn't have it any other way.

"When you're an artist, the creative process owns you," Noel says. "If you stop it, you're not experiencing life the way it's meant to be."

Noel has always wanted to try his hand at sculpting, to mold and create a more substantial form than a flat canvas allows. On March 8, he will unveil his first foray into sculpting at 1dd Studio Gallery in Miami. The upcoming show includes 18 artist proofs of each of his first two sculptures. The diverse show, which will include new paintings, also features mixed media pieces, using charcoal, metallic, acrylic and oils.

"People will see more than ever before how different the work is," Noel says. "It's still me; nonetheless, you see this great variety of work."

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Noel found the transition from one medium to another seamless, and believes that sculpting is easier than painting.

"In sculpting you don't need to worry about creating your light and your shadows," says Noel. "Light is already traveling throughout the form. The sculpture has it's own entity and the light is already there. It catches the object and creates the shadow."

The journey toward the finished sculpture included clay casting, wax casting, melting bronze onto wax, finishing, and then adding the patina. Every piece in each edition is different.

"In order to mold it you have to put in some muscle, work up a sweat," he says.

Noel has always been an artist. He started studying ballet at age 4 in his native Cuba, beginning his professional dance career at age 14. He toured the world with dance companies, and came to the United States in 1981. During his schooling, he also studied painting, and engaged in that art form by designing sets for various dance companies.

In 1986, Noel retired from dancing to dedicate himself to art. He says taking the leap from dancer to painter was not difficult, but found another hurdle that was more challenging.



Noel with *Unity*, a painting he created with artist Romero Britto

"It was difficult to make the transition from dancer to human," he says. "The human didn't have much to say until I let go of the dancer."

In channeling his creative energy into art, Noel found immediate success. All 20 pieces from his first show sold on opening night.

"Painting became a necessity," Noel says. "I was forced to shut off one creative outlet. Dancing was all I knew when I quit ballet, painting became the only way I could express the creative part of me."

Incredibly prolific---40 new paintings last year works out to a new painting every nine days---

Noel credits his strict ballet training for his discipline and professionalism as an artist. His background in ballet frequently finds its way into his work, whether he's painting dancers or in the theatricality and movement his work portrays. He works around the clock.

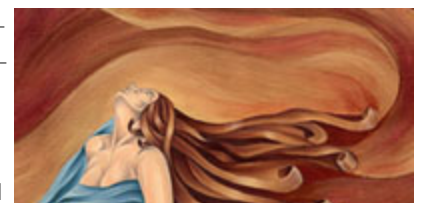
"Sometimes I'm sleeping and I'm working. I dream of a new painting," says Noel. "When you do what I do, your work is your life, your life is your work."

Noel appreciates the lifestyle being an artist affords him---living in Miami Beach, traveling the world, meeting people--and finds unique ways to combine his work and his life, which brings us back to the cruise.

Once the ship returns to Miami on March 4, Noel says he'll



Noel's *Movimieto I (en azul)*



only be getting a few hours of sleep each night because he has much work to do before his March 8 opening, including finishing a painting for the exhibit. He assures me that he will finish it, and promises to have our photo taken together in front of the painting on opening night.

"Whatever I need to do to make it happen, that painting will be on that wall," he says.



Marea Alta

His enthusiasm is impossible to doubt.

"The artistic pressure is a high for me," Noel says. "The more I paint the more I create. It's a vicious circle and I love it."

Noel's one-man show opens Thursday, March 8, 6:30-10:30 p.m., at dd1 Studio, 55th Street Station (behind Soyka), 5582 NE 4th Court., Miami. The exhibition will continue through March 25. For more information on Noel's work, visit studiodnoel.com.

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