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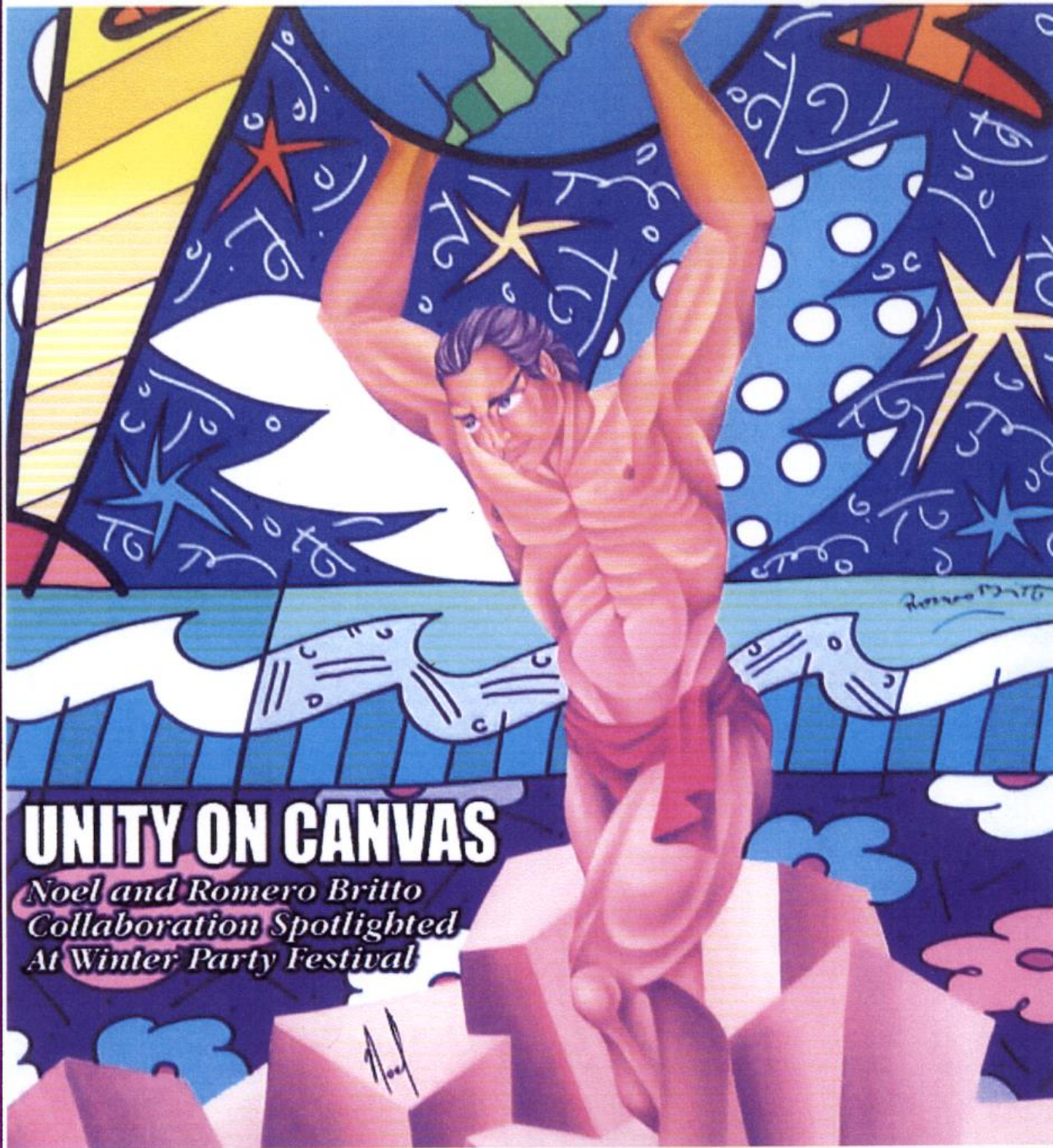
February 24, 2005 • FREE

THE WEEKLY NEWS

twm

South Florida's

Community Newspaper



UNITY ON CANVAS

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Collaboration Spotlighted
At Winter Party Festival

Unity on canvas

Noel and Romero Britto collaboration spotlighted at Winter Party Festival

By LOANN HALDEN
Associate Editor

Imagine taking a dramatic oil painting from the collection of Noel – a showcase of fluid lines that evoke his balletic background – and combining it with a piece from the whimsical, vividly colored world of fellow Miami artist Romero Britto. Seem a little far-fetched? There was a time when Noel would have probably agreed.

Britto tossed out the idea of a collaboration as the two artists were chatting at a South Beach party a few years ago, and Noel says he had a hard time visualizing the outcome.

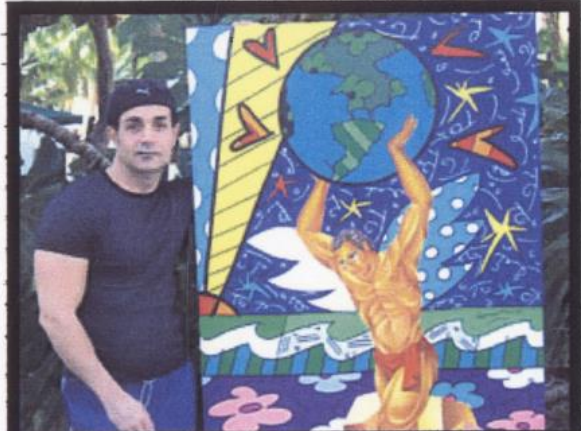
"I'm like, 'Romero, you're one extreme and I'm the other. How are we going to meet in the middle? That's going to be very hard,'" recalls Noel, as he combines a phone interview with working on paintings for Art Expo in New York. "He said, 'Let's think about it and let's talk about it some more.'"

"I find his art very interesting," says Britto, via his trusty BlackBerry, about his offer. "He reminds me very much of Lyn Pike; and he's a fellow artist from Miami Beach."

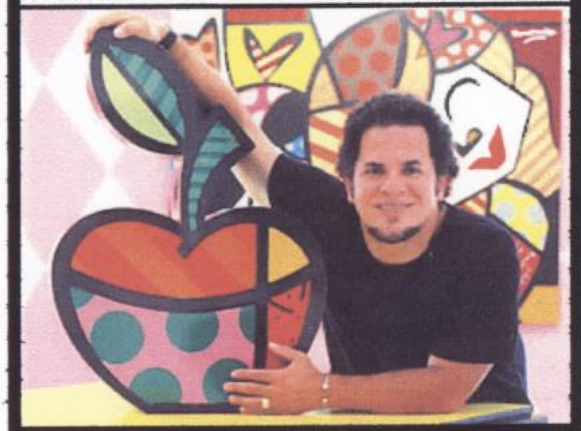
The more Noel pondered the idea, the more it made sense. "Every artist I know, from beginning to present, there's always been collaboration," he says. "Why not?"

South Florida art fans will get their first up-close look at the results of this unlikely pairing at "Unity on Canvas," an art event March 3 at Britto Central that is part of this year's Winter Party Festival. Noel and Britto collaborated on five paintings and the Winter Party event serves as a sneak preview for the full exhibit, which opens March 16 at Britto's Lincoln Road gallery.

"This whole thing has been three years in the making," Noel says.



MIAMI HARMONY: Noel on Lincoln Road with "Unity," one of his collaborative paintings with Romero Britto. They are donating the artist's proof of the painting to the Winter Party Festival for auction at the VIP cocktail event March 5.



The centerpiece for the Winter Party event is "Unity," which was the first in the series to be completed. Noel painted the strong Atlas figure who strides forward through a sand-colored cityscape, while the globe he carries and the backdrop are pure Britto.

"It was hard to pick subjects between the two of us," says Noel. "The creative part of sketching the pieces took me a long time, because it had to be done in a way that would represent the two of us 50-50, and as you know our styles are so, so different. That was not an easy task.

"[I] did the sketches, but at the same time, I was talking to him and showing them to him and getting feedback to make sure it had both of our input.

"I liked the feeling of the force that carries us through everyday, in this case represented with a very strong male image," he says of his inspiration for "Unity." "Since I'm always using the female image, this time I decided to go with the male image; and then the force that unifies us and carries us through life – that's how the idea of unity came out. ...

"Britto added the wings. That was a last-minute decision. I thought it was very appropriate."

Just don't ask Britto to describe the inspiration for his contribution to the work: "The inspiration process is the whole universe that I'm immersed in," he says. "It is so spontaneous, I don't even know."

The additional pieces in their collaborative effort vary widely in subject matter. One is a mother and child, one has a beach scene with swimmers; the other two are named "Circle of Friends" and "Urban Angel."

"I wanted each piece to have its own identity. I wanted them all to be strong pieces and unique pieces. The style makes them like a series," Noel says. "Unity comes in because of the fact it's the two of us unifying our work.

"There's nothing too heavy," he adds. "They are pretty fun pieces."

"Unity" also takes on added meaning in the case of their contribution to Winter Party. Noel and Britto donated