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Wonderwoman Series
ww13-20, 100 x 100cm
Impasto and Acrylic on Canvas

My Words

Extracts taken from Richard's book, published in 2005, ISBN: 0-620-33988-8

My Paintings

I found myself painting white with thick black lines surrounded with solid vibrant colour. Partly thanks to Paul Gauguin, who once told a student "if you see pure vermilion, paint pure vermilion", and mostly thanks to me wanting to get a message across.

The white represents the pureness of the subject. The secret world within the subject, the secret world within every object and creature, big or small. The secrets we, as humans, only bare to those very close to us. The world that we know so little about. Society has conditioned us to ignore this and focus on the outer shell, the colourful outer shell. We only expose the pureness when we break down our lines and can no longer cope with the situation society has presented us with.

We choose to see the colourful side of subjects. It all stems from evolution and our origination from apes. A place where the colourful and strong creatures get to eat and mate to ensure survival.

Society has conditioned humans to draw such hard thick lines between our outer and inner beings, that we cannot see the white for the colour. Humans even do this with nature and man-made objects. We choose to ignore the animal life and mountains and forests. We choose not to see the pureness of these subjects, we choose to kill and cut down to use in our colourful society. Our conditioned society.

My Past

I have no formal art training. The world of the artist has nothing to do with your upbringing, it has everything to do with hype. Van Gogh was poor, Picasso was poor, we were all poor at some point.

In 1987 I left school and was forced to do two years national service. It was a waste of time to me, except the army taught me respect. In 1989 I got a job as a trainee Technical Illustrator. You know, those guys that draw exploded views of engines and stuff. I spent two years drawing small nuts and bolts as I slowly moved up the ranks to be in charge of 10 people.

Seven years later, in 1995, I left and started an Internet company called Internet Online. The aim, purely marketing, was to give DJ's free websites in exchange for exposure. I was way ahead of my time. Unfortunately, I was too young and naïve to grasp the business aspect of it all. I sold everything I had and went to America to be discovered. On my return, three months later, I had nothing. My dad sent me R30 a week. I was poor.

I found a restaurant that gave me food in exchange for designing menus. I applied for job after job. Finally with the help of 5FM DJ Mark Gillman, I pulled a job for R7 000 a month. This soon went to R12 000. From R30 a week to R12 000 a month, I was made, or so I thought I was. Two years passed and I decided to start another Internet company.

In 1997, with the help of Salomien, Mark Gillman and a few back-handers, I founded Shocked. In 1998 we took on two partners and Shocked became one of Cape Town's leading IT companies in two years, with a head count of 25 and an annual turnover of R3-million. In 2001 I implemented my exit strategy to take up my real passion, art.



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My Passion

In 2001, I played around for a while to find the right medium, style and use of colour that would get my feelings across.

I wanted to show the world, through my art, that I disliked conditioning. This has resulted in what we today term human society. The whole human element brought on by greed and policing have led to the building of barriers between what we think is freedom and what real freedom is. I wanted to be unique. I wanted to take the lead. I wanted to produce my thoughts through objects in the most simple, colourful and pure way.

I have always had a passion to create, now I had found how I could marry my hatred of conditioning with my love of art. Art was my answer. This was a great day. An even greater day when I dropped off five paintings at Hout Bay Gallery and the owner, John Hargitai, agreed to hang my paintings in his gallery. John's partner Marika bought my first painting, right there and then, for R300. The other four were sold in the same week. Seven more sold in the following three weeks, and 112 in the next 10 months. Two years later, sales topped 500. In the beginning, I remember looking at the art in Hout Bay Gallery wishing I could hang there. Now I read ArtReview and wish I could hang there.

If I look back now as I read about art, I realise that the work of most artists worldwide follows a theme close to them or their country. I was passionate about being universal and not taking on a label. I steer clear of issues and focus on simplicity and colour. I want people to enjoy my art on their walls, not spend hours trying to figure out the issue, meaning or hidden message. Maybe as you become more renowned, it cannot be avoided. With this in mind, I realise art is a game. I was hooked and loved the game of art. Yet, for me, the game had only just begun.

My Game

I soon realised that the art world was quite exclusive. Art, to me, has three main ingredients: hype, time and a product, in that order. Art requires the right amount of hype delivered to the right person at the right time. It helps if you have a unique brightly coloured product and an artist with an attitude. A catalyst for conversation.

I soon became wise in the ways of the art world. I do not paint to eat, so my arrogant approach was not welcomed by most. In the beginning rejection took its toll. Adapting and adjusting quickly, I used this to my advantage. Rejection and criticism became a drug as I thrived on people's negative comments. I allowed myself to get sucked in, and tried to control my own game. I managed this with some success but soon realised that the game has two sides. You need to be on both. It also takes time to get to a point where people call you. Once you reach that point, the game becomes a lot easier to control. I wake up most days thinking "which face shall I wear today?"

A lot of people did not like me and my new-found success, yet those that chose to see through this and back me were the ones that benefited both financially and in recognition. In any normal business, it is easy to promote your product or service. There is little to no personification involved, just a product or service you are promoting. When you are an artist, promoting yourself, people start to use words like arrogant and narcissism. Most artists do not play the art game, the business game. Artists think that hanging their work in all the galleries in town is the answer. It is not what you know, but who you know. In today's art world, if you want to get to the top, you have to be passionate, selective, informed and a narcissist. It is a business call.

And so I conform to the business of art. You scratch my back, I will stab yours, or is it the other way around?



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My Business

I spend more time with my computer keyboard than I do with my paint brush. I spend more time in front of my monitor than I do in front of my easel.

One of my critics and buyers, Keith Sharper, says I am the best marketing person he knows.

Art is marketing, marketing is my business, business is my life and life is my art. And so the circle continues. In 2002 I sold my Internet company to take up art. In 2004 I sold my house to invest in my art career. In 2005 I sold my plot to buy my first Kentridge and Murakami. I am passionate about my business. I am also passionate about sharing knowledge, it elevates you. In 2004, I donated artworks for auction, and they raised more than R100 000 for charity. I intend setting up a foundation to better manage my donations and channel more into the arts. My business is my life, I cannot rest. When I go away on holiday you will catch me working on my mobile phone drawing pictures, downloading email. Only when I leave at 4am to go fishing, with my good friend Chris Basson, do I do nothing. Actually, even then, we talk art while waiting for the fish to bite.

As soon as a piece is complete it goes up on my website. As soon as I hear something in the Press, it goes up on my website. I am very serious about my website and it is used as a reference for all my material, from admin, to a catalogue of works, to the dates of works produced. It even has my own art collection on. Sue Lipschitz and I only met face to face two years after our initial telephone conversation. We conduct business via the Internet.

Maybe it is because I can paint five large paintings in one day. Maybe it is because I had an Internet company. I am just happy here all on my own, making art my business.