

Sample Interview with Scott Fray of Living Brush, bodypaint artist, who is preparing to break the Guinness world record for “most bodies painted in a 24-hour period”.

Tell me about yourself and your art.

I am a U.S. bodypaint artist, exploring the myriad applications that this art form can take. Together with my partner, Madelyn, I paint at outdoor festivals, clothing-optional events, for film and theatrical productions and as a fine artist, creating limited edition prints of my work.

What is body painting/how is it done?

Bodypainting has been around since tribal man first began to create art. Body art/decoration/modification have long marked rites of passage in tribal societies around the world, continuing to this day. Modern bodypainting may encompass more skill and artistry as well as modern methods of painting, such as airbrush. I use a simple brush, often finding that a lyrical calligraphic quality emerges from the improvised designs. The art is inherently ephemeral, lasting only a few hours, like a Tibetan yak-butter sculpture or a Native American sand painting. It simultaneously hides and reveals the nudity of the subject, highlighting unexpected aspects of self to both the wearer and the observer of the paint.

What got you interested in body painting?

I have essentially always made my living as an artist. While happy to be able to utilize the talents I had been given, I hadn't run into anything that excited my artistic sensibilities in quite some time. A woman at a festival approached me about putting a simple decoration on her arm, and I complied. I was amazed at the response that followed! Had I done the same thing on canvas, who knows who would notice, but on a living being, the art took on a life of it's own. It has shown itself to be capable of eliciting the most powerful response. It's highly evocative.

How long have you been doing it?

My partner and I have been painting together for two years. I have been painting for over four, myself. Together, we are Living Brush (www.livingbrush.com).

Where/what events have you created your art at?

I have painted for two films. A short, "Portrait", by Jose' Carrera of Spain, and the feature-length, "Crazy Animal", by John Birmingham, filmed mostly in LA. I have painted as entertainment for events as diverse as Burning Man, concerts and "First Night" (family-oriented New Year's) celebrations. I have painted performers for all sorts of theatrical and dance performances including some of my own production. Fine-art giclee' prints of my work are offered at New Orleans' "Painted Alive Gallery", the first of it's kind in the world, devoted solely to bodypainting art.

What was the wildest body art you ever created?

Though I've done paintings that could certainly be considered wild in content, I did one that had a wild result. At a festival where I was painting, I was finished for the day and just ready to clean up and have dinner. A young lady approached me about painting her that day and (despite jeers from those around me who'd heard me stating earlier that my day was over) I somehow just couldn't say "no". Two hours later, I'd turned her into a beautiful flower garden, blooming from head to toe and sent her off to be enjoyed by the world. To my astonishment, she came back, and stayed, and we've been bodypainting as a couple for the last two years.

A method I often employ is to intuitively pull the painting from the person modeling, using the "soul" to decorate the skin. It can turn out some surprising results, such a wild and ferocious bodypainting on a seemingly introverted model. After questioning at the end of such a painting, however, it usually turns out that the person had a wild side after all, just one that was well hidden until now!

What gave you the idea to try to break the record?

Last year, I attended a festival where mention was made about breaking the Guinness record for most bodypainted people in one place. However, no actual organized attempt was made to do so. It seemed like a good idea, though. When I returned home, I set about registering with Guinness so that we could have a go at it. We are ready to try on July 15, 2006, at the Brushwood Folklore Center in Sherman, NY. After breaking the record, I intend to create art with hundreds of painted people by arranging them in interesting configurations in a field to create "The Living Mandala", which will be photographed from above, perhaps by ultralight airplane.

Is there anything else you'd like to share?

Yes. In the course of speaking to the people at Brushwood about the record-breaking event, they have offered us the opportunity to create a festival of our own. The American Body Arts Festival will be a world-class bodypainting event, similar to the World Body Painting Festival that takes place each year in Austria. We will have a multi-category bodypainting competition as well as a gallery component featuring art and photography. Also included will be many more modern and traditional body arts, along with live music and performance. This is slated to take place in August of 2007. (www.americanbodyartsfestival.com)