

The Healing Power of Art Bob Pitt's Journey with Progressive Supranuclear Palsy

Robert Winn "Bob" Pitt knew he wanted to be an artist for as long as he has memory. As a three year old, living in Baltimore, Bob would communicate with his grandfather in Tennessee by mailing pictures that he had drawn. His grandfather, in turn, would send pictures back to Bob by mail. This was Bob's earliest recollection of using art as a form of self-expression.

After leaving high school in Baltimore, Bob's family moved back to his parents' home state of Tennessee. Not wanting to work at a factory like his father before him, Bob served a short stint in the Navy. After his discharge, he received a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Memphis Academy of Art. This degree launched his career in advertising.

Bob's career as Art Director spanned three decades and took him from Nashville to Miami, then on to Atlanta, where he earned a Master of Visual Arts degree from Georgia State University.

During a successful career in Atlanta, he worked on national accounts that included Delta Airlines and Six Flags Over Georgia. Bob was known in commercial art circles as a respected creative talent, and worked with some of the country's largest advertising

agencies, starting in the days recently dramatized by the AMC TV series, "Mad Men."



During his tenure as an Art Director, Bob won many awards, including the prestigious CLIO Award.

Despite his success in advertising, Bob's true passion has always been self-expression through personal art projects. Bob's style of art has evolved and changed over the decades and has covered the spectrum from realism to surrealism and spans all mediums and styles.

Above - Rolling Into Mecca 2008

This was Bob's last work of art in a 'realistic' style, before suffering with PSP, requiring him to transition to an abstract artistic style.

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The style of art in which Bob is most prolific is a genre all its own that Bob calls "Abstract Expressionism With a Cartoon Flair." Of all the work that Bob has produced, his favorite works are those he created in a realistic style.

What sets Bob apart from many artists is that he likes all forms of art. What he finds enjoyable is not so much the style of art in which he works, but the creative process itself. "Art creates itself," says Bob. When people enjoy his art, he hopes they get a chuckle from it and appreciate it for its value.

After retiring from commercial art, Bob enjoyed several years doing art for his personal satisfaction, which fulfilled his passion to create. Retirement was proving to be both productive and enjoyable. Then, in the Fall of 2011, Bob was moving a potted plant on his patio when he lost his equilibrium, causing him to fall. It wasn't the fall alone that left him scared, but the fact that, when he began to fall, he was unable to catch himself to soften the blow. Similar incidents, and the increasingly present sense of dizziness, caused him to pursue treatment.

Initial visits to the ENT ruled out an inner ear problem. That led to an appointment with a neurologist with an initial diagnosis of Parkinson's Disease. The drug Carbidopa/Levodopa, which has variable levels of success in Parkinson's patients, was prescribed for Bob. Unfortunately, the drug had no impact at all on his symptoms which led, in part, to invalidate the diagnosis of Parkinson's disease.

A second opinion was sought, and the second neurologist believed that Bob had Progressive Supranuclear Palsy (PSP), an atypical Parkinsonian disease. One of the symptoms of PSP is uncontrollable eye movement. This uncontrollable eye movement results in disequilibrium causes unrelenting discomfort and dizziness, resulting in frequent falls.

No curative or palliative treatment is available for the disease, so the diagnosis of PSP was a bombshell for Bob and his family, who pulled together to find ways to mitigate the challenges ahead of them.

Since his diagnosis in 2012, Bob has constantly reinvented his art to accommodate his disability. Since he can no longer draw realistically, he says he just "goes with the flow and lets it happen." This has resulted in some remarkable abstract paintings, still carrying Bob's unmistakable style.

Bob's son, Joe, shares his father's passion for art and is now working as a Storyboard Artist with DreamWorks Animation. Bob's advice to his son, and to all others wishing to try their hand at art, is to "Do what you feel like doing and do your best at it. Art will be kind to you if you give it your best shot."

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Just as Bob communicated through art with his grandfather in another state all those years ago, he is once again proving the value of art in human communication. One of the symptoms of PSP is loss of the ability to speak, but Bob's art will continue to speak for him long after he has lost his voice.

Bob's art is an incredible gift. It has provided him with a lifetime of gratification and, now, a reason to get out of bed in the morning. To those faced with the diagnosis of Progressive Supranuclear Palsy or any other life-altering disability, Bob advises to "Keep doing whatever you do, as long as you can do it, because it helps you to be everything you can be, rather than to merely exist."

The journey with PSP is one that challenges both victim and loved ones to grasp and cherish every moment of life.



*Above Left: Bob Pitt, at his desk at an Atlanta advertising agency in the early 1980's.
Above Right: Bob in June 2014, working on a new abstract painting in his home in Atlanta.*

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Above, left: Bob and Joe Pitt, at Society of Illustrators, L.A. (SILA) Awards Show in 2008. Above, right: Bob, sitting in front of one of his paintings at the Left Bank Gallery in Atlanta. Left: Bob, standing in front of his painting titled 'Rolling into Mecca' with his SILA Award.

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The following pages contain samples of Bob's work following his diagnosis with PSP. Some of Bob's earlier work with various styles, media and subjects can be viewed on two websites: www.bobpittwatercolors.com



Western Robots vs. the Big Eye, 2010



Red and Black, 2010

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Unda Da Sea, 2011



Rizzzzz, 2012

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Seetah, 2013



Once, 2013

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Small Faces, 2013



On the Beach, 2013

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Mystery Ship, 2010



Nazsca Landing, 2012

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Moët, Chandon and the Peeping Toms, 2012



Mayan Sunset, 2014

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Yum Yum, 2010



I'd Rather Do It Myself, 2014

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Formal, 2012



The Bully, 2012

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Chippey Chuanga, 2012



Be Still, 2014

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Be There or Be Square, 2013



Baby Square, 2013