

THE LAST POST



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Interview:

Greg T. Ross of *The Last Post Magazine* (TLP) and

Benjamin L.M. (BLM)

Sydney, NSW, Australia



TLP: This new collection of pop art paintings called *Return To Innocence* is very different from your last series called *Spiritual Chaos*.

What's the meaning behind the new ones?

BLM: The last series of paintings was very heavy and about the world of now more, savage paintings, wild brushstrokes, primal. I just had to say something about this hardcore spirit war going on in the world. So these new ones had to be the opposite, total light

weight, free of the heavy world, back to the simplicity of childhood, not primal, no brushstrokes.

Also, three major people in my life brought in stress, so I left them. Doesn't matter if it's your parent, spouse or good friend, if they were great and then go wrong for too long, cut them off. They'll be unhappy about that, doesn't matter, get rid of them. Life on earth is finite and I'm under no obligation to waste it on people that can't manage their mental, alcohol or drug problems. Some deserve a chance and explanation, but some don't, so I just look after myself and walk away, explanation or not. It goes the other way too, if I became a problem for someone else, I'd understand if they left me. Time on earth gets shorter with each passing day, there's no time for unhealthy people-relations and pointless stress. There are always good people in my life, always new ones coming in to replace the bad ones going out. I won't tolerate destructive people in my life.

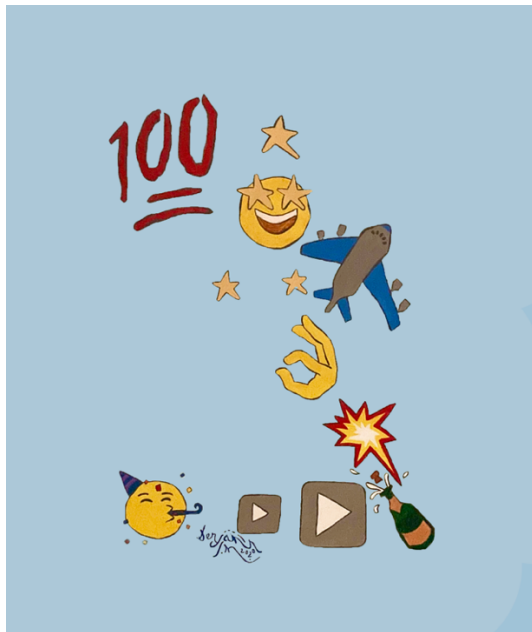
The stress those people caused me needed to be shaken off, I'm not carrying that around, that's what got me thinking about the idea of making paintings with meanings that go back to the simplicity of childhood to ease the grief of the adult world. Everyone gets adult problems in different ways, we all do, the thing is, too many people put up with it, you don't have to, but if you do put up with it, don't complain.

These are the most basic paintings I've ever done, my first pop art series. It was fun to do them and now they're fun to look at. I dealt with my stress in the *Roots Of Innocence* paintings by making happy ones instead of angry ones. I left these paintings open for anyone to get the same reward from them. Deal with problems, then go to the happy place, don't live in distress.

TLP: Well handled! I agree. Tell us about each of the five new paintings individually?

BLM: I just can't make art without meaning, to me, that's pointless, there's plenty of art without meaning out there. I tried to do art without meaning in 2016-17, abstract and minimal digital artworks, no titles, deliberately trying to remove meaning, but I couldn't. They all still meant something, very basic and hidden. These pop art paintings have lightweight meanings, deliberately. It's pop art for adults. The world and life itself seem to ruin or kill a lot of people I know or read about, it's scary and sad. I give others hope and strength through my art and titles, and I get that from them too. Be free of the world, enjoy the innocence, the simple things.

In the *Play Celebrate Fly Stars* painting I'm saying go for times of being 100% positive, remove all negative, see the wonder with stars in your eyes. The plane is the flight in your spirit. The play button symbol means keep moving no matter what, don't get stuck, don't stop. The champagne bottle popping means celebrate the nothingness of life when everything is fine, no reason needed.



Play Celebrate Fly Stars. 2020. Acrylic on canvas

Then we have the *All Variations Are Good* painting which is me saying that in my time, knowing people who are gay, transgender, or cross-dressers, no problem with me, they've all been decent and normal. The painting also includes the heterosexual man / woman symbols, it's a basic 'well done' to the general population of

constructive people that don't do crime, don't cause problems with people, the lovers. Green ticks all round.



All Variations Are Good. 2020. Acrylic on canvas

Love Makes Luck is a painting about how choosing love and positivity seems to give good luck, just as choosing hate and negativity seems to give people bad luck. When I watch videos of people that have done good or bad things with their lives, they seem to be the same: They were meant to do what they do, they have no choice. People are predestined and driven one way or the other, then they spend their lives doing good or bad, and in return, they get good or bad back. It doesn't always happen straight away, sometimes it takes a long time, but eventually you get back what you put out. It's logical, nobody can escape the unchangeable structure of reality.



Love Makes Luck. 2020. Acrylic on canvas

Happy Being Lifted is a painting about how I can see very clearly that my life is lifted by a single spirit above, in turn that makes me lift myself, it's a joint effort. I am less, the spirit is more. We're not alone, the set-up of life, nature, space, humans, animals, there's no way humans could make that, never, we're not good enough, not smart enough. To me, it seems impossible our reality could just happen out of thin air and evolve. Love and the feeling of it is a very real part of life, that's an invisible and physical reality. All feelings in general can't evolve out of nothing, they have to be made by something that knows it, created it, and passed it onto us. All reality has to come from spirit into physical, not just the physical alone.

Life on earth is more of a spiritual event that lives forever, rather than a physical event that stops on earth when we die. The sun in *Happy Being Lifted* is being lifted by hands above, nature was made by the same spirit as humans, to me, it's so obvious, it's magical, it's the greatest event ever, nothing we do can compare to that. Not everyone agrees with that and that's ok, I'm not here to convince anyone, what we all think is right. I'm here for a reasonable discussion, not an irrational argument.



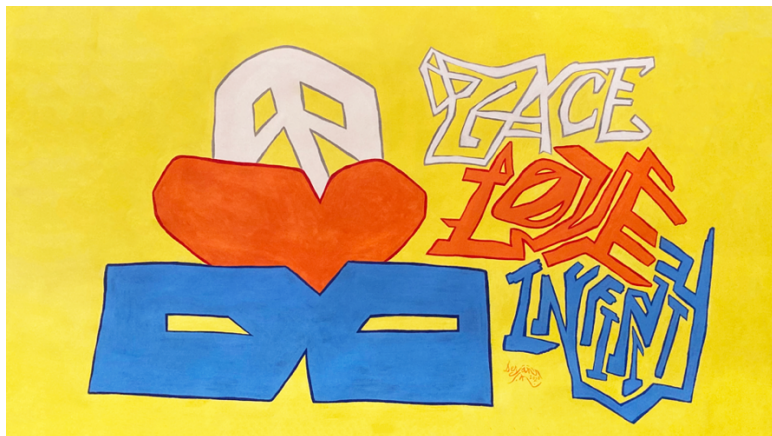
Happy Being Lifted. 2020. Acrylic on canvas

Peace Love Infinity is the final painting in the series. Three words, three symbols. It makes me laugh and cringe that these symbols are the most powerful, yet it seems very hard for the world at large to

make peace and love happen. Most people don't believe in infinity and eternity. It's such a trick, we come from perfection, from love, we're eternal, but life constantly looks the opposite, hatred in the news, problems everywhere, a culture of death in movies. It sickens me that so many people think our culture is normal, it's not, this world of politics, movies, social media, education lies, church lies, 6 o'clock news, television, it's designed to keep you *away* from knowing where we came from and enjoying the good in daily living.

We come from good, we can live in love and peace, we continue past death. Society has always been sick, but now it's more out there, social media is twisting society badly in a whole new way. I'm very careful as to what I watch, read, consume, and who I hang out with.

I make myself focus on the good, so I feel good and think right, that's also the point of these new paintings, to forget the world in a constructive way and focus on the absolute simplicity, the bare bones of life. See the world again as you did when you were a child, the essence of love and peace in the timeless moment. Bring the power of childhood into adulthood to be free of the dark world that is out to get you.



Peace Love Infinity. 2020. Acrylic on canvas

TLP: Stylistically, did the history of pop art influence this new series? Do you like pop art?

BLM: I never liked pop art, no, it lacks blood, guts, and power. It's more graphic design than fine art. In pop art it's too easy to use photos, photocopies, and computers to make it look like you can paint something realistic when you actually can't. Roy Lichtenstein was pretty good though. To me, paint with brush on canvas is the place where artists get sorted out between having no meanings and no skills, or full meanings and full skills. Sculptors and Photographers can also be as great as any Painter, and some are. The exception of the lot is abstract art, it doesn't count, anyone can do that.

I always thought I'd never do pop art as it seemed impossible to make it good. But then I went against myself and said, just do it man, make it until you like it. To offset the last *Spiritual Chaos* series and switch directions, I needed something with no brush strokes, something happy and lightweight, basic meanings, kid stuff, so pop art became my style to suit those needs. I like how mine came out in the *Roots Of Innocence* series. I won't write off any art style now, I'll try anything.

At this stage I'm going to change my painting style quicker by doing shorter series', instead of one long series of ten paintings in one style, I'll do two short ones of five, different styles. These new virtual online art exhibitions have helped with this, I like it.

TLP: Is art just a human activity that's dead, or is it a spiritual happening that's alive?

BLM: My world is paint on canvas, it's *very* much alive, it's spiritual, it's worldly, the meaning stays in them for all to see, year after year. If you can connect with a painting made five hundred years ago, then it's alive. If people see my paintings live in the flesh, or just a photo in a virtual gallery in the computer, and they get something out of it, then it's definitely alive.

Personally, if I didn't connect with art, music and the holy book when I was in my darkest days, I'd be dead. There's something in art and

music that can save a certain type of person like me. The spiritual revelation that saved my life was helped by art and music, not church, not people. Art and music gave spirituality credibility that people of my time still believe while enjoying the world also, it's not a thing of the past. The holy book could never give me the revelation on its own because it's so old, I needed the modernisation of art and music to get me there.

Me making art from nothing, to idea, to written title, to drawing with pencil on paper, to painting on canvas, signed, finished, then exhibited is very real and alive. It consumes me fully when I do it. It's bigger than me, I'm just a part of it, amongst it. Art does wonders for me. Art works double for me, it works for me as I make it, then it works differently once it's out there and exhibited for anyone that likes it, and the photos of all my previous paintings are alive to the world also. It's always a buzz to me that whenever I do a new series then show and sell them, old paintings also sell. To me that says that the old ones are still alive, there's something in them that people need, that's why they buy them, and they're not cheap.

In this modern age the internet is a great place where art can get to people worldwide in a way it couldn't before. An art collecting couple in Las Vegas recently bought three paintings in one shot from the *Spiritual Chaos* series, and they've never seen the actual paintings live, just photos in a virtual art gallery. It thrills me to know that those art collectors will get to experience those paintings in the real for the first time, it's *so* much better than a photo. Painting photos are a world away from the full experience of seeing them in the flesh.

TLP: While the new *Roots Of Innocence* paintings are a contrast to the last series of paintings, are they also set up to heighten the contrast for the next series coming up?

BLM: Yes, how did you know! I specifically made the new 2D pop art paintings as a contrast to the last series, but also as a contrast to the next series. I knew I was going to stop doing acrylic paintings on

canvas in 2021, and go fully into virtual reality (VR) art. I've had a play with VR art before with the goggles and paddles, but now it's time to make full and complete pieces. I have a VR art rig set up, I'm ready to go. In VR, when you're in there it looks amazing, a whole new world of art, some of the VR brushes you use are moving objects, like flaming fire or a blinking neon light. The only hassle with VR art is there's almost nowhere to show it. A painting made in VR, when taken out, it's not the same, it loses all its 3D, atmospheric, and moving qualities. You have to view VR art in VR.

So knowing that the next series of art by me in 2021 will be VR art, that it's very much more 3D than my acrylic paintings, I deliberately made the *Roots Of Innocence* ones flat and 2D, to heighten the contrast. I'm loving these 2D traditional paint on canvas works as I prepare to make the next 3D VR works which live-in cyberspace. I love my known 2D art and my unknown 3D art, it thrills me!

Benjamin L.M.

Roots Of Innocence

5 December 2020 – 25 January 2021

Virtual / online art gallery:

www.artavita.com/virtual_exhibitions/424

Art show put on by:

ArtAvita

Santa Barbara, California, USA