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'Nurture your muse'



Marina Brown has followed her muse from dancing to painting and back again in "Dance with Me." MARINA BROWN

Amanda Sieradzki
Council on Culture & Arts

Several years ago, watercolorist Marina Brown was writer-in-residence at the Tallahassee International Airport. From the wee hours of the morning until midnight she roamed the terminals, speaking with travelers and jotting down their stories. She came to view the airport as a magical state of in-between, neither here nor there, where a traveler becomes their most authentic self.

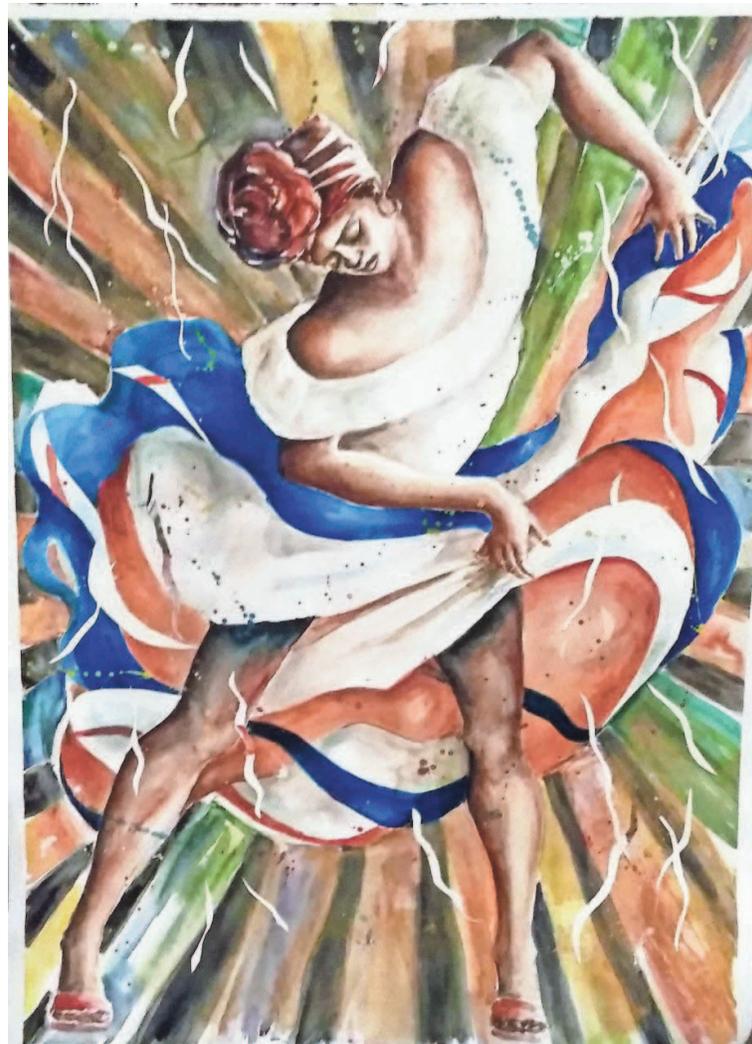
She wishes for her watercolor paintings to occupy that same headspace during her solo Artport Gallery exhibition, "Dance With Me," — touching viewers in that middle place where they are most open and receptive. Now through Sept. 10, travelers and gallery goers will be met with sizzling flamenco dancers wielding fans, a Spanish dancer in decoupage, hip-hop b-boys, a midnight soiree of men and women dancing and playing their horns on a bridge, and many others who hope to whisk them off their feet.

"The same stories that are in the paintings or that you interpret when you're dancing are there to be told about human life," says Brown. "It's all part of this river with little streams that flow off one another."

Movement is embedded in Brown's inventive spirit. She toured as a soloist for renowned ballet company, Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, joining their ranks at the age of 15. In high school she had been awarded a scholarship for art, but instead chose the path of professional ballerina after falling head over heels at first sight of pink, satin pointe shoes. However, Brown quickly took to writing poetry and sketching on the road as the bus whizzed through cities like Chicago, Boston, Los Angeles, and New York City.

"Art was always there, and a lovely place to go," reflects Brown. "Whether it's drawing on a Styrofoam box when you're waiting for the check to come or a napkin. Sometimes before I fall asleep at night, faces or dancers flash across my mind. So they're always there, and if I have a pencil or a brush they'll find their way out."

Brown paints nearly anywhere and any time. Her workroom is divided between watercolor and writing — Brown is an established writer for publications such as Dance Magazine, Tallahassee Magazine, and the Tallahassee Democrat as well as an award-winning author whose paintings have illus-



Yo So La Habana is part of the "Dance with Me" exhibit by Marina Brown At the Artport Gallery. MARINA BROWN

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Muse

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trated her book covers. When she needs to take a closer look at her work however, she'll search the house for the best lighting, ending up in the bathroom or laundry room, or even propping a painting up underneath the stove hood.

She zeroes in to capture the soul of a piece and is inspired by images from other cultures. Many of her sketches focus on the lives of African Americans in particular. She also feels a mystery and magic surrounding historical sites like the Bradfordville Blues Club. Her style spans from "careful, articulated," portraits to more abstracted bodies in motion, working from both photographs and memory.

"For instance, you make a loose figure eight for an arm or a thigh or a calf that are just undulating lines" describes Brown. "If I need a motion, I might look in the mirror to see how the hips and torso bends."

Sidelined with a dance injury in her early 20s, Brown pursued nursing school. Studying bodies came naturally to her as she delved into musculature's interior landscapes. By moving from the dance studio to the operating room, she reacquainted herself with the human form's intricacies, which subsequently lent itself to her teachings at Butler University.

"As a dancer you're looking in the mirror, studying anatomy, and studying what makes a beautiful line," said Brown. "As a nurse you're really touching bodies and getting to see the muscles and internal anatomy. When I teach students anything about art, I always talk about how you have to know that structure underneath. You can't just draw somebody; you've got to know where the muscles lie over the bone."

Once married, Brown reclaimed art during the afternoons while her children napped, with watercolor being the easiest medium to use in those fleeting hours. She found that the paint wants to be guided along the paper and lets the lines blur and flow.

She used to soak the paper and stretch it, but now uses a heavier material when she paints. After sketching out her ideas in pencil, she starts the "terrifying beginning" of laying out background colors, layering and glazing, and folding the colors together.

"It's a medium that kind of paints itself," says Brown. "You can help it along but it has its own mind."

The Artport exhibition will be the second time her painted dancers find themselves in the spotlight. The first was a year ago at FAMU's Meek-Eaton Archive gallery. Prior to de-installing the show, Brown sat in the quiet space amidst her work and wrote a poem.

Her goal was to encapsulate the feeling that these paintings were thrilled to be on display, to be admired, and didn't want to go home into a cupboard or closet. Her poem gives a voice to these painted figures who wanted to stay, to perform, to be seen. She writes that they "cry out in hymns to God, begging to be left to sing from these walls/In this ma-



Corn Dancer by Marina Brown, part of "Dance with Me." MARINA BROWN

nila light, their stories on watercolor lips."

"They're kind of hams," laughs Brown, whose work continues to manifest across mediums. "A creative life can be an arc, and you have to nurture your muse always. Just be still and there will be magic under the surface that comes to find you."

Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org).

If you go

What: Dance With Me: Artworks by Marina Brown

When: 8 a.m.-11:30 p.m., daily through Sept.10

Where: Artport Gallery, 3300 Capital Circle SW

Cost: Free

Contact: For more information, call 850-224-2500 or visit <https://coca.tallahasseearts.org/art-in-public-places/artport-gallery>.