

An artist's life:

Scott, who says he paints not to eat but because he can, is writing his name on the planet's surface

Childlike simplicity and a big plan

THE artist dips his brush into the palette, scooping up a big lick of colour and slapping it onto the canvas with glee. A splash of shocking blue; a burst of sunshine yellow; a jolt of blinding Arctic white, the colour that isn't even a colour.

The artist lets go of the brush, like a caveman resisting the impulse of evolution. He jabs his fingers into the palette, and begins daubing colour onto the floor and walls, as if the canvas isn't big enough to contain his imagination. Meet Richie Scott, 3, contemporary artist.

He has been invited into the studio, in Melkbosstrand, near Cape Town, by his father, Richard, 37, who is working with slightly more restraint on a painting of a woman in a bikini, outlining her curves with a series of fluid black lines that lend flesh and substance to the numbing nothingness of white. "Ja," says Scott

senior, casting a glance at the paint-splattered toddler heading for the trestle-table, "in the beginning I would take a little strain when people told me that my work was child-like. Now I take it as a compliment."

Picasso once said he spent his career learning to paint like a child again, but Scott seems to have got it right from the start. His bright, witty works appeal to the three-year-old inside us, but at the same time they are entirely grown-up in their almost brutal discipline: a series of pet subjects (cats, cars, trees, flowers, cottages, lighthouses, "babes") etched in solid white against blocks or splodges or dribbles of smack-in-your-face colour.

You can tell a Richard Scott from across the room, which must explain why Woolworths uses a selection, blown up to banner size, to shout the way to the kiddies' section. But it is not just the retail textile merchandisers who have fallen under the

spell of Scott's astutely marketed brand of, well, let's call it Kiddy Pop.

Since persuading the Hout Bay Gallery to hand over R300 for Two Trees in a Field of Sky, a 90cm x 90cm impasto and acrylic on a home-made pine frame, Scott has sold hundreds of works at home and abroad, not because he needs to, but because he can.

"I don't paint to eat," he says, having made his bread-and-jam in internet development during the dot.com boom. In 2002, he sold his thriving Cape Town company, Shocked, and reinvented himself as a full-time artist, drawing only on a few years of art class and a stint as a technical illustrator: "You know, those guys that draw exploded views of engines and stuff."

This background seeps through in his nuts-and-bolts approach to art, which he views with a disarming absence of pretension, and a sly sense of reverse psychology that implies he couldn't care less about his own success. "I would rather someone wanted my art," he declares, "than had it in their possession."

But of course he does care, and on an exponential scale, just as his canvases have zoomed from modest squares into almost wall-size oblongs. Already, plans for the Richard Scott Foundation, which will provide space and funding for aspirant artists, are well under way.

RICHARD SCOTT

There will be seven buildings, in seven cities around the world, each devoted to a different medium, and each taking their shape from the

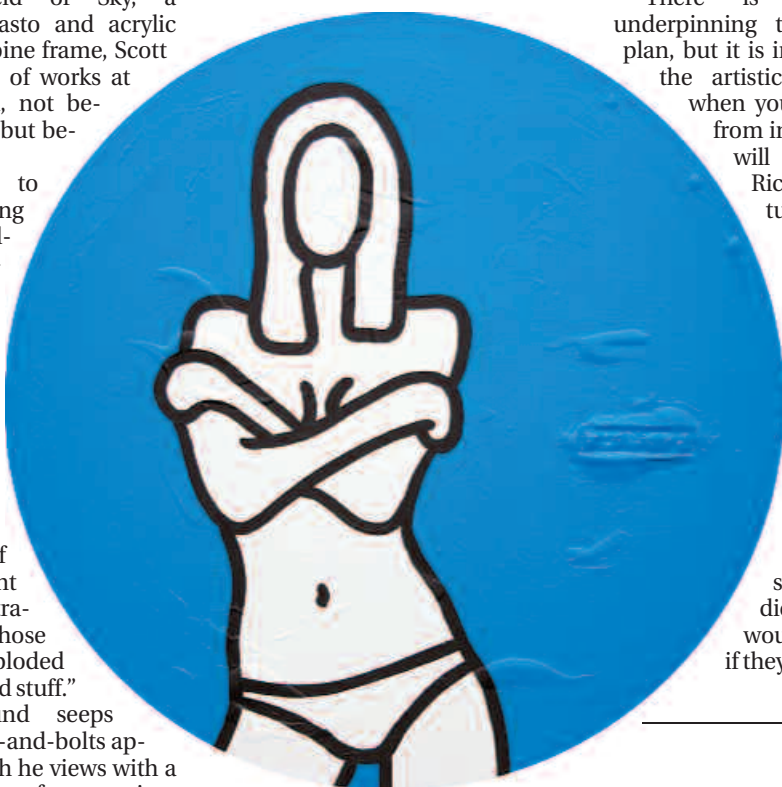
lowercase letters of his stamp-block signature. The first "r" will be built in Cape Town soon, with the rest to follow within the next 15 years.

There is a philanthropic underpinning to this starry-eyed plan, but it is impossible to ignore the artistic vision: one day, when you are looking down from interstellar orbit, you will be able to see Richard Scott's signature from space.

For now, he is happy enough to make his mark on the planet in colour and line, in a style that will make some people go, "But my three-year-old could have painted that!"

To which the only possible answer is that they didn't, and the world would be a better place if they did.

Gus Silber



Above: Blue Who, 2004, impasto and acrylic

Right: Richard Scott in his studio

Below: Rose Redhead, 2004, impasto and acrylic



IF YOU'VE GOTTA HAVE ONE ...

WANT a Richard Scott on your wall? Only three years ago, you would have been able to pick up a 90cm x 90cm Richard Scott canvas for less than R500.

Today, you can expect to pay up to R10 000 for a work of the same size, and about R2 000 for a 30 x 30cm work.

On the auction market, a set of six 30 x 30cm Scotts fetched R16 000 at Sotheby's last year, while a 150cm x 150cm work went for R35 000 in Rotterdam.

Scott's work is available at several Cape Town galleries, including the Hout Bay Gallery (www.houtbaygallery.co.za), the Rossouw Gallery (www.art10.co.za) and the Virtual Gallery (www.vgallery.co.za).

For more information, contact Scott's agent, Charl Bezuidenhout, on 082 901 5045, or visit www.richardscott.com.