



# speaking in colours

## getting to know Richard Scott

Richard Scott is a well-known figure in the art world, if not for his child-like renderings and identifiable signature, then for his role as a genuine family man. CINDY MORITZ met him at his Melkbos studio to find out what makes this family man tick.



his wife, son and daughter; hearing people say, “I wish I did that!”; Paul Gauguin – painting masses of colour, and the sea. Those are the things that inspire artist and businessman Richard Scott. In that order.

It’s not hard to tell that Richard’s a family man at heart. Having met with great success in the IT field, which culminated in being bought out for a substantial sum, Richard was in a position to make the decision that many of us dream of: working on your own terms to fit in with family life. “One of my ambitions was that when I had children I wanted to be at home. When Salomien and I got married, we decided, ‘Let’s do this, and have children.’” It was when they were on honeymoon that Richard considered art as a career. When their first child Richie was born, the couple moved to L’Agulhas, where Richard found the time and peacefulness for creativity to flourish.

The quaint, simple atmosphere proved a little too quaint and simple for Richard to make L’Agulhas his permanent home, though. So they found a good compromise: they moved to Melkbos, on the west coast, north of Cape Town, which has the feeling of a seaside village, yet is close enough to the city for business and some play. Holidays are spent, mostly, back in L’Agulhas, in a beautiful house that they get to around ten times a year. Little Richie is now four and half and his sister Angelina is one and a half, and they are used to seeing their dad at home every day, especially for a sit-down lunch around the kitchen table. “I fetch Richie from school and we come home for lunch. We sit around the table for all three meals,” says Richard, “and each person has their own chair. It’s important... it’s where we talk about stuff, which is more important as the children get older.”

How, though, did Richard get from deciding to give painting a try and aiming at being a dad that’s available to his family during the day, to actually doing it? “Though I have no formal training, I did do art as a subject at school and worked as a technical illustrator for a couple of years, drawing small nuts and bolts and stuff,” Richard explains. In a bright little block of a book, which started

world, if you want to get to the top, you have to be passionate, selective, informed and a narcissist.” Richard admits that he does not “paint to eat,” and that his “arrogance was not welcomed by most”.

Richard was always clear about what he wanted to do and why. He had a clear business strategy, and an even clearer parenting one. “I want to give my children a lot of confidence,” he explains. “I let Richie play with matches. The lady next door starts to warn him that he’ll wet his bed, but I don’t agree with that... I let him do it. It will make him independent.” Richard is fully engaged with his role as parent. “I don’t believe that as a parent I want to fix what my parents didn’t give me. That’s not really the case.” He reads the likes of Steve Biddulph, author of *The Secret of Happy Children*, *Raising Boys*, *Manhood* and other parenting titles. “You’ve got to read the books,” he says, though admits to mostly going with his instinct. “I drill in manners to the extent that it’s become almost a joke,” he says, with Richie thanking him for



doing something as simple as parking close enough to the pavement for him to get out of the car easily. “I give him carte blanche when he comes here,” he says, referring to the house that is his studio on the beach. “The other day he and a four-year-old friend, Sean, were here, tracing pictures onto a canvas, just as I

do. My advice is to put aside a few pairs of shorts and T-shirts for your children to use for creative activities and let those be your child’s painting clothes. Even have a wall in your home that’s your child’s painting wall,” he suggests, just as Richie has his own canvases in his dad’s studio.

As far as instilling a love of art in South African children that aren’t his own, he is big on encouraging them at school level to enjoy and appreciate their own creativity. “Schools need to focus less on maths and more towards education in the arts,” says Richard, who believes in giving children broad exposure to the subject. “I took my children, including Salomien’s niece of 13, to the National Gallery. She loved it.” While the younger two may not have appreciated the experience to the same degree, Richard feels that at least it becomes familiar to them. “Art’s not as accessible to the children here as in Europe, for example,” he reckons. “There

“In today’s art world, if you want to get to the top, you have to be passionate, selective, informed and a narcissist.”

out as a concept to market Richard Scott, but ended up being a book of facts about him and his art, he attributes his first artistic influence to his high school art teacher Mr Fuel. “He made art interesting for me,” says Richard, “and I work a lot on instinct,” he adds, which refers both to his art as well as to his parenting style. But what distinguishes him as an artist is his approach to business. “Most artists do not play the art game, the business game,” he writes in his bright little book. “It is not what you know, but who you know. In today’s art

it’s inbred. It’s historical and cultural.” He does his part in bringing art into schools by offering himself to the schools with which he has a relationship, but that, he believes, is still not enough. “I want to start a foundation one day for children who want to go into art,” he says, adding that if he helps only ten people to get started, he’ll be pleased.

Richard doesn’t deem anyone in particular a mentor, but he did have a few ‘angels’ that helped him to achieve this dream. One of these was art dealer Charl Bezuidenhout, ➤



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**first person**



**quick facts**

favourite restaurant Groot Constantia, though I could go to any restaurant as long as I had good company. On The Rocks in Bloubergstrand is good too, and the L'Agulhas Lighthouse serves great bacon and eggs.

favourite artist I don't want to say Takashi Murakami, because it's a bit clichéd, but I do like him... his business model is phenomenal.

reading I'm not reading at the moment... there's a series of Keith Haring children's books that I want to read. The last book I read was Richard Branson's biography.

best holiday When it's not Agulhas, we love to go camping – either the Cederberg or the Karoo. We take the fridge, Richie's got his kites, and off we go.

who joins me on a warm summer's day at Richard's Melkbos studio. Chatting over coffee and croissants, apparently a sort of ritual between the two, it's clear that there's an incredible synergy and understanding between these men. There is certainly a shared passion for art and marketing, and strong agreement that "the world is a very small place". Up on Richard's wall is a list of the world's top 100 in the art world, and he and Charl point out who's who in the zoo, so to speak. "We're aware of where we can get to," says Richard, referring to the amount in pounds for which even the 100<sup>th</sup> artist sells his work. Among the list is artist Takashi Murakami, for whom Richard and Charl have the utmost respect. It has a lot to do with the fact that Murakami is as much a marketer and businessman as an artist, something to which Richard avidly relates. "It's about the hype," he explains. In his little book, he elaborates: "Art to me has three main ingredients: hype, time and product, in that order."

me has three main ingredients: hype, time and product, in that order. Art requires the right amount of hype delivered to the right person at the right time. It helps if you have a unique, brightly coloured product and an artist with an attitude."

He seems apt at delivering the hype to the right people, Charl being among them. Creating unique, brightly coloured product is clearly what Richard does, his method uncomplicated and perhaps even commercial. A walk through the studio sheds light on the process by which his immediately recognisable works are produced. "I've got all these different sized canvases in my storeroom," he explains, "and I cover them with 100-percent acrylic, the same stuff that builders use. I stamp them with my signature stamp, and that takes a day to dry. Then I project an image via an overhead projector, or maybe I'll draw freehand, or I'll sometimes carve an image into it." He then brings in the help

of assistants Justin and Francois, who do the "colouring in" as such. He chooses his colours, mixes the paint, and they apply as instructed. "Some people are critical that I use assistants, but look at great artists like Rembrandt... you didn't become an artist unless you'd worked for a master, these guys have an opportunity to learn and I hope that they'll become artists themselves in a while."

Richard will do a series, such as the popular *Nursery Crimes*, where he'll paint 20 paintings and that will be all. Others he may consider repeating in response to what the market wants, but he's at a stage where he can afford to decline commissions and gallery exhibitions if he feels like it. "I'm not so driven to do the exhibitions any more. I've reached a point in my life and career where I can limit that."

This doesn't mean that he won't be exhibiting at all, though. Upcoming exhibitions will include *Beauty and the Beast*, and *My Zoo*, which he says refers to his family rather than the animal kingdom. He plans to take a leaf out of Murakami's book and include novelties such as blow-up characters and other fun 'experiential' facets,

which may be sold during the exhibition. This ties in with Richard's firm grounding in business, which, after all, allows him to be the family man he is. "I've always been a bit of a loner," he reveals, "so I'm focussed now on building my business, building the Richard Scott brand. I love to travel, take my wife and family to England, to Italy. I focus heavily on my children, do the stuff they want to do," he adds, and when he buys them something he's always sure that it's good quality rather than rubbish. Which means that he needs to keep selling his art, something about which he is fervently positive "I've made ten times more selling my work than five years ago," he says, adding that he has faith in the state of South African art. "Art isn't like property... it's not going to crash."

As I leave the Melkbos studio, it's clear to me that Richard is exactly where he wants to be in his personal life as well as career. "I am just happy here all on my own, making art my business," he writes in his notes on his frequently updated website, www.richardscott.com. That really says it all about the brand, and the product that is Richard Scott.

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