



Art, Music is the Heart and Soul of ‘Joshua2’

📅 December 31, 2021 👤 Abby Luby 👁 269 Views ⌚ 4 min read

Maybe it’s how he soulfully sings the blues or deftly paints his large canvases or molds his uniquely shaped vessels. Each creation by artist and musician Joshua Brittingham seems to emanate directly from his soul, from an inner space informing him of a plethora of emotions unfolding from social inequities and worldwide painful discrimination to a transformative place of where negative vibes become positive. Brittingham’s art and music stays with you.



Joshua Brittingham in his Somers studio with his original vessels and paintings. Abby Luby photo

A tall, bespectacled man with a hearty laugh, Brittingham, 60, professionally goes by the name Joshua2, a name he gave himself after a traumatic, life-threatening experience prompted him to forgive his parents for naming him after his father.

Brittingham and his wife, Holly, have two adult children. The couple moved to Somers five years ago after living in Harlem because he “needed to get closer to nature.”

As a youngster, Brittingham grew up steeped in the Pentecostal faith, singing gospel.

“We were hard working Black people who worked in factories in what I call one step above the Great Migration from the south in the 1930s, ‘40s and ‘50s,” Brittingham recalled. “We knew this country was not good for us, was not going to help us, but we held on to Jesus Christ. It was incredible to take on the religion of your persecutors. I see this now.”

Many of Brittingham’s paintings have bold gestural strokes, jaunty angles, thick lines, vibrant cubist shapes and deep, rich colors that reverberate the anguish of wrongful enslavement. The undeniable message in much of his work is about the Black diaspora from the Jim Crow South where racial segregation was legal.

His mother was from Alabama and his father from Mississippi. He was one of eight children, and the family settled in Delaware where Brittingham’s grandfather served as a pastor.

Brittingham’s original paintings sell from \$12,000 to \$18,000 and giclée prints are priced at \$750 to \$4,500. Among his use of rich symbolism are thick encumbered nooses and wide-eyed crowned figures of Jesus and crosses. Many surfaces on the canvas are layered with pages of scripture.

“It’s my way of denouncing the scriptures,” Brittingham explained. “If people really read the Bible, well, it’s not a happy book. My use of scripture pages means to warn people to really study and understand Christianity.”

Brittingham sees religion as a movement taking advantage of disparity.

“You see big stone cathedrals all over the world in poor places, like in South Africa, a church that offers sanctuary to the poor,” he said. “But that big church is what keeps people poor.”

Not limiting his creativity to just two dimensions, Brittingham creates large, organically-shaped vessels, delicately leaning vases or lotus bowls, which all radiate a living presence, especially when you stand next to or hold one. Using recycled and repurposed glass bottles, he recreates the shape using reconstituted, hand-made paper made into a thick, textured pulp applied to the bottle, layered and painted.

As an accomplished performing musician Brittingham regularly sings with his band. They have performed in Harlem, Delaware and abroad in New Zealand, Germany and Amsterdam. Locally, he performs outside his Somers studio twice a year. His last concert in September welcomed visitors into his gallery.

Brittingham’s rock ‘n’ roll and blues songs may sound familiar but he often rewrites the lyrics to “tell the history of our people and credit those who actually wrote the words and composed the blues but died penniless in a little shack while others took credit and became famous.”

Brittingham has his own version of the song “Strange Fruit,” composed by Abel Meeropol and recorded by Billie Holiday in 1939 about lynchings. The song compares victims to fruit hanging from trees.

Whatever mode of expression Brittingham chooses, each is a commentary on religion, the current state of racial inequality and healing. As a leader of the Black student union while attending the University of Delaware, he recalled countless protests, being arrested, beaten and going to jail repeatedly. His take on the current Black Lives Matter movement is that it doesn’t go far enough.

“I appreciate what BLM is trying to do but it’s on the surface,” he said. “I want to change the laws still on the books that say discrimination is legal. There are still Jim Crow laws that say if you are 15 percent Black, then you are a Black person. We also need to change the laws that legally allow a person from lynching Black people,” he said, referring to the killing of Ahmaud Arbery, a Black man murdered by two white men in Georgia last year.

Currently Brittingham is embracing Taoism, incorporating symbols of the Eastern philosophy in his visual work.

“The Tao tells us about peace and love, and that’s what is missing in the scriptures,” he said. “My family were all healers and I create from the heart.”

To learn more about Joshua Brittingham and his art and music, visit <https://joshua2studios.com>.

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