



AN EXPRESSIONIST WITH ATTITUDE

Sarah Ashley Longshore's witty art goes international

by Lisa LeBlanc-Berry

A self-taught artist who opened a small gallery a couple of years ago on Magazine Street in New Orleans, Sarah Ashley Longshore has become internationally known for her comical and irreverent expressionist paintings, a unique line of chairs, and most recently, her artful kitchen bowls that were commissioned by Anthropologie, a national retail company that is always looking for new talent. A new Anthropologie location featuring Longshore's bowls and other work is opening at Canal Place in August.



For the budding pop artist, being discovered by Anthropologie was a major breakthrough. "They have over 100 stores all over the United States," says Longshore, whose accolades include being named one of the Crescent City's "Top People to Watch" by *New Orleans Magazine*. "Anthropologie sets the trends. As a self-taught artist with a little store on Magazine Street, it is a huge compliment."

Longshore recently attended the star-studded opening of Anthropologie's new location in New York City to promote her one-of-a-kind chairs and colorful bowls that the company commissioned her to create for its stores and catalogues. Such projects are the mark of success for rising star artists just getting their foot in the corporate door.

"For an artist wanting any kind of corporate collaboration, Anthropologie is a dream," Longshore notes. "They allow me to maintain my artistic integrity. It's a huge opportunity for me."

Longshore recently spent several weeks in Portugal creating bowls for the company. "Anthropologie flew me to Portugal to hand-paint bowls for a collection," she says. "I got a call from the director and was told that they wanted 3,000 bowls right away. Now I'm being featured in Miami, I'm designing custom fabrics for a company that collaborates with the W Hotel and the Ritz-Carlton, I'm doing a show in L.A. and a show in Atlanta. I've got art being shipped all over the world. It's crazy, what has happened!" she exclaims. "The ball is really in motion. It's kind of scary."

Longshore is no stranger to being in the limelight. Her studio gallery, which is always bulging with new work, has attracted a celebrity clientele including Penelope Cruz and *Vogue* cover girls Salma Hayek and Blake Lively. "I'm actually doing a custom chair for Miss Lively and two paintings for her new apartment in New York City," she says.

"My thing is that I am not just an artist. I'm so much about marketing and sales and making it happen. I think it was Andy Warhol who said, 'Making art is art, and making money is art.' I am an art sales powerhouse," Longshore reveals. "I wake up at six in the morning, I'm marketing, painting, and working fast until around 10 at night, every night."

Many of Longshore's brightly colored, sassy expressionist paintings at her gallery are inscribed with such comments as "Take your pills, pay your bills" and off-color comments about trophy wives, including "Every time a bell rings a trophy wife gets more things." A recent favorite is the "Sugar Daddy" painting series depicting inscribed candy on a stick.

"Ironically, these are the very women who inspire me and who buy my paintings, the trophy wives," she says. "I started doing all of this at age 20 while living in Montana. ►"



I took a semester off of school just to paint. The president of Mexico's daughter was also living there and she gave me a one-woman show at her gallery. She bought some really racy paintings I did and put them in her dining room," Longshore recalls. "I got my first big write-up after that. I signed a card with a man's bare bottom exposed on it, and I put it in a basket of peaches and dropped it off at the local newspaper."

Longshore's pop-art chairs, which feature elements of her paintings, are available at her studio gallery on Magazine Street. She started making them a year and a half ago. "In Louisiana, we're all about beautiful furnishings and homes, so I thought I'd try to do some chairs," she explains. "I would go to antique stores to buy chairs, and then I took images from my artwork and had them embroidered onto the vinyl. The next thing you know, we have these really cool chairs like the Audrey Hepburn collection. People were just loving them. First of all, they're hysterical!"

Some of the chairs worth viewing at the gallery are the double-wide "Paparazzi" chairs with cameras embroidered on them. "I really like to combine the use of words and images in an unexpected way to create a small, colorful, bold statement," she explains.

Longshore has just created a new line of "Time Out" chairs that are being introduced to her shop in July. To see them, you can drop by Longshore Studio Gallery, 4848 Magazine Street.; 504-458-5500 or visit www.ashleymlongshore.com.

"I will also be making them for children," she comments. "Let's face it, everybody needs a time out chair. I'm also going to have some great little vanity chairs with 'OMG' on them. We've all got this madness going on in our lives, plus the oil spill, and the hurricanes," Longshore says. "When you come home at the end of the day, you need to have furniture that makes you giggle. It's okay to have a sense of humor and to celebrate color. Not everything has to be so serious." ♦