



Chocolat

The famous quip, "Too much of a good thing is a good thing," is particularly true when it comes to chocolate. One of the best places to experience that delicious excess is with the "Chocolate Painter," aka Lebanese-Australian Sid Chidiac, who discovered his

passion and talent for art through chocolate (yes, chocolate) paintings.

Chidiac's Wonka-esque designs don't require Oompa-Loompas to create the magic in his unusual artistic medium, which never ceases to amaze viewers

across the globe in exhibitions in Los Angeles, New York, Paris, Sydney and Kuwait.

Each of his chocolate paintings is completely edible right down to the frame. Here, the chocolate magnate shares some nuggets of wisdom about everyone's favorite indulgence.



Interview with Sid Chidiac

ALO: What in the world made you start painting with chocolate?

Sid Chidiac: I was working at a hotel in Sydney while in college, and one of the hotel chefs asked me to assist him in creating an artistic piece made from chocolate for a Paris chocolate exhibition. After the exhibition, the chocolate artwork was in my possession, and I was desperately fighting the temptation to eat it or even look at it (chuckles). I experimented with different chocolate brands and created more paintings, and everyone I knew loved them and was astonished by the work and could not believe they were made of real chocolate. I thought I could make a real living from this, so I packed my bags and headed to New York, where I walked to an exhibition hall and showed off my paintings. Right then and there, they agreed to include me in the next exhibit.

ALO: How long does a painting take to complete?

SD: For my first New York exhibition, it took me almost 10 weeks to complete 7 paintings. But I would say it takes about 20 hours to complete one painting. It is a long process, and I am exhausted at the end but feel very accomplished.

ALO: Walk us through how you typically go through creating a sweet masterpiece

while preparing for an exhibit.

SD: I get invitations from all over the world, whenever there is a special or unusual art theme involved, and people call me to exhibit my works. I am usually able to pull a plan together based on that individual theme.

ALO: You only use Barry Callebaut Belgian chocolate and have gained sponsorship by the chocolate maker. How did this company discover your work?

SD: I mentioned the chocolate brand I use in a magazine interview, and shortly after, I received an email from Callebaut offering sponsorship and as much chocolate as I need for my artwork. That is how the relationship started. As far as the brand is concerned, I feel Callebaut is the number one chocolate in the world. It is little known by the public because it does not cater to markets and individuals.

ALO: What is the inspiration behind your favorite paintings?

SD: I do not have a favorite. My special painting however is Ivan and Joshua, the mother and child painting, and this is the one particular painting that I take with me to all exhibitions and get asked about wherever I go.

ALO: What did you do at the recent Tattoo and Body Art Festival in Moscow?

SD: Since it was a body art show, I had an

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amazing exhibition, where I had a different nude model each day, and I painted her live as part of the exhibit. I wanted to go for something different, so I painted on one side of her back the story of myself in Arabic writing with letters on top of each other. And on her front side, I painted flowers, so at the end; the model looked as if she was dressed with chocolate.

ALO: Do you have any plans to open your own gallery?

SD: Actually, yes I do. I would like to create a chocolate museum in America. I have not yet found a fine art chocolate museum in the U.S. I will not only exhibit paintings, I want to also display sculptures and other art made out of chocolate.

ALO: What about people's reactions to your work? Any crazy experiences regarding your painting?

SD: In Stockholm, an elderly man pulled a painting off the wall and ran with it while I was being interviewed by a reporter. When I chased him down and asked what he was doing, he said he wanted to prove to his family that it was real chocolate and that he was not crazy. In another incident, at a New York exhibition, I had to damage a painting and make a judge eat the chocolate to prove to the judges that it was real chocolate and not a canvas with spray on top of it.

ALO: You have a reputation for being extremely charitable. When did you discover your passion for helping?

SD: I was born in Australia but spent much of my childhood raised in Lebanon. I saw a lot of needs, and my family was giving, and I grew up with that in mind and helped others in need.

ALO: Which charity is closest to your heart?

SD: I do not have one charity in particular. I like to know where the money is going and how it is being used to help.

ALO: What celebrity would you like to paint?

SD: Mohammed Ali because he achieved a lot from nothing.

ALO: Who were you most flattered by when you found out they were fans?


SD: I really don't get flattered, but I am most touched when I see children who are so excited about the paintings and want to learn how to paint with chocolate just like me. I get so many requests to teach and give lessons to adults and children.

ALO: Some say that chocolate can be preserved for over a decade. How do you preserve your paintings, and what advice can you give to those who purchase one?

SD: The first step is a secret technique I do with the chocolate itself to make it very strong and hard. This technique, alone, can keep the art in shape for about 10 years. The painting can actually last for thousands of years if coated with resin, so that the color and chocolate are preserved as is.

ALO: Are there any plans to expand your creativity with chocolate into other mediums?

SD: Yes, my next project takes me to Istanbul, where I will be researching King Saidoon's coffin, the king of Saida, Lebanon. It's a coffin that was transported along with 24 others to Istanbul during the Turkish rule of Lebanon. I have been commissioned to paint the coffin. I would like to start doing sculptures as well. I would also like to publish a book about my around-the-world-experiences and exhibitions and feature my paintings with a story on each. ■



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