

**Thinking outside the ART BOX. Chatting it up with local art impresaria Sofia del Rivero**

Many people think about starting their own business. And then there is **Sofia Del Rivero** who actually did. The idea behind ART BOX was inspired by what she believes is a lack of enthusiasm in hands-on art activities. Art Box offers creative workshops and art lessons designed to involve the creative drive, covering areas such as drawing, painting, sculpture, and mixed media. The studio offers something for all ages. *Dirty, colorful, messy and wildly creative.* This art teacher wouldn't want it any other way.

**When did you know you wanted to be an artist?**

I knew from an early age, probably 5 or 6. Art quickly became my favorite class at school as well as my favorite thing to do in my free time. I enrolled in every art class. Spent hours drawing, painting and I received a lot of encouragement from my parents, teachers and peers. They helped fuel my passion.

**When did ART BOX in Coconut Grove open?**

We opened in May of 2014.

**Describe a fantastic day at ART BOX?**

A fantastic creative day begins as early as 9 am with an art lesson for adults. The format is "open studio" in which a small group of 3 to 5 students will be in the studio each working on their own individual project, like drawing, painting, sculpture or printmaking. In the afternoon, things get jumping with my after-school students (ages 4 to 12) who participate in workshops with themes such as Contemporary Art, Art History, and Art Around the World. I love these classes because each theme of the day is studied and then each student proceeds to creating their own unique masterpiece. Then in the evening once a month, we host Art Night for adults, which is open to the public. It is open to all levels, and my absolute favorite part of the evening is watching participants surprise themselves. I can feel the level of their accomplishment and newfound confidence. Creating is a rush!

**You clearly love teaching. When did you discover this passion?**

I honestly never thought I would end up teaching kids. My trajectory was pointed towards graphic design or working in an advertising agency like my parents. And then I taught a class and started to really understand the value and impact I can make in one child. Art class allows a child to escape their safe little bubble. The rules can be bent. You can think outside the box. You can expose them to amazing artists and what their world is like. Soon the kids start asking a million questions, eyes grow wide, and you can see the wheels turning as they project their own artistic vision. When I first experienced these *AHA* moments with my students... I knew I would be doing this for a very long time.

### **At what age should children start art classes?**

You can never be too young to explore your inner creativity. As soon as a child begins grabbing objects, understanding textures, making marks with anything on anything, like using a stick-on mud, or marking sand, or using pencil on paper, they are already responding to their innate need to explore and create. Stimulation in a child's brain is crucial the first five years of life in order to maximize their visual, auditory, fine and gross motor skills. Art class is beneficial for all children. There are consistent studies that prove there is a strong correlation between art and academic achievement.

### **What are the advantages of adults taking up art?**

It frees you up to step out of your comfort zone and learn something completely new. Young kids dig right in art class. Adults can be skeptical and sometimes intimidated. The ability to acquire new skills and improve artistic techniques does not have an age barrier. My students enjoy being around people like themselves. Explorers who can feed off each other's energy. It is very rewarding to be the facilitator to these experiences.

### **What advice would you give young artists who want to pursue a career in the arts?**

Do art. See art. Take advantage of every opportunity to go and see new things. Take an art class, see gallery exhibitions, street art, or even follow artists' Instagram accounts. All these exposures will inspire you to try new things, and your own creativity will start to pour in. The art world is always evolving, so it is important to try to get out there. Stay fresh. Keep your wheels turning. Never stop learning. Get out of your box!

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