

FORT LAUDERDALE'S CITY MAGAZINE

GO RIVERWALK

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"Fire at the Juke,"
last year's Riverwalk
Blues and Music
Festival poster



"Disco Shoe"

PORTRAIT OF AN ARTIST

ARTIST JOE KLUCAR'S DISTINCT STYLE DOESN'T FIT IN A CATEGORY
- IT IS A PRODUCT OF HIS BACKGROUND AND IMAGINATION

WRITER CLARISSA BUCH

Joe Klucar's artistic style is nothing short of original – his work, novel enough to be selected as the official poster for the Riverwalk Blues and Music Festival for the past 11 years. His kind of art is "pop surreal," as he puts it.

Klucar developed a knack for drawing at an early age. As his aptitude grew, so did the attention of his family and teachers. Their validation only fueled his developing passion – he learned more and sought to improve. One of his first jobs was at an art store – Rex Art Supplies in Coral Gables. He used the opportunity to learn from the artists that stopped in. After several jobs in the art field, he started out as a graphic designer with



Artist Joe Klucar

an illustrator focus. That was in 1992. Two years later, he worked for Warner Brothers Publications, where he became an art director.

"I've been an artist my whole life," Klucar said. "I currently work as a graphic designer and senior art director at an advertising agency."

He has been a design professional for the past 18 years, but a chance meeting with neo-pop artist Romero Britto while working at Warner Brothers inspired him to think about actually pursuing art more seriously. Exposure

to various genres over the years has shaped the formation of his own style, which he says doesn't necessarily fit into a category.



"Ocean's 11"



"Tangerine Dreams"

"It's always so hard to classify my art. I don't really like to label, but if I had to pick one, [pop surreal] would be appropriate. The style is very pop, and I like to throw in surreal elements."

That style is the common thread in his growing repertoire of Riverwalk Blues and Music Festival posters. In honor of Black History month, this year Klucar decided to pay tribute to "Strange Fruit," one of Billie Holiday's most iconic songs. The 1939 record, a reaction to the inhumane racial injustices of the time, was written by New York City native Abel Meeropol. He initially wrote the lyrics as a poem after he saw a photograph of a lynching.

To Klucar, "Strange Fruit" is one of the most powerful songs in music. It is the vision for the 2015 festival poster (on the cover of this *Go Riverwalk* issue), which pictures Billie Holliday standing behind a microphone with her

eyes closed. An abstract composition of hearts dangle behind her. "I was just really inspired by the song and what it means and stands for. It's just so powerful."

Klucar anticipates festivalgoers will appreciate the piece because of its pop elements, but also hopes they will recognize its deeper meaning. "When I created the painting 'Strange Fruit,' I thought, like the song, it could serve as a reminder of the racial injustice in our nation's past. Today, we are witnessing the largest protests over racial injustice in my lifetime. I was aware that racial injustice still exists today, but I had no idea it was going to be so topical."

He also thought it would be a great opportunity to feature a woman on the cover.

"There are so many blues festivals where you typically see a man featured [on the poster], but to have a woman, I think would be great," Klucar said.

The only concern Klucar has is the fact that the piece deals with such a heavy subject matter. "I would hate people to think that I was trivializing it. I just hope that it's taken with love, [to] honor those whose lives were lost and affected. My intention is from a place of love."

This year's festival event takes place on Feb. 14 and 15 in Esplanade Park. There is a chance to own this piece of South Florida music history as Klucar is currently selling the painting. For more information, contact Klucar through his website, www.klucardesign.com. ©