



# Arts & the Olympic Games 2020

A Winning Combination with artist  
and champion Roald Bradstock:  
Rapid Fire Interview Series

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BY RACHEL VANCELETTE

Roald Bradstock is an Olympic athlete and Olympic artist nicknamed the "Olympic Picasso" by the media. He is a member of the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) Olympic Cultural and Heritage Commission and Chair of the newly formed World Olympians Association (WOA) Cultural Committee called "OLY Arts". He is also the Executive Director of an international organization of 60 Olympian and Paralympians artists called Art of the Olympians (AOTO). We sat down for one-on-one to discover what the plans and outlook are for Japan 2020 and his mission to keep the Olympic art torch alive!

Bundled up to defeat the winter's freezing temperature in 2018, a powerful blending of sport and inspired artistry came together for the first time in the history of the Olympic Winter Games. Former Olympians who are also artists were invited to the PyeongChang 2018 Winter Games to be part of the "Olympic Art Project" developed by the IOC. Leading the artistic cultural infusion were athlete/artists Olympians Alexi Pappas (10 km runner), Roald Bradstock (Javelin Throw), Lanny Barnes (Biathlon) and Jean-Blaise Evequoz (Fencing) who were the "Olympian/Artists" instrumental in the XXIII Olympic Winter Games art project. To create the stunning signature painting for the games, 111 Olympians joined to paint the inspired work, a large 15 panel canvas depicting the famous Olympic rings and multiple sports figures. 39 countries participated and luminaries shared in the art experience included IOC President Thomas Bach, WOA president Joel Bouzou, HSH Prince Albert II of Monaco, and Alexandre and Diane de Navacelle de Coubertin.

The 2018 games had two artistic projects, the first involving a series of short films d'auteur on location by Alexi Pappas and partner Jeremy Teicher. The second undertaking inspired by the Winter Games was to paint 15 paintings, originally planned for one per day, in a workshop lead by Bradstock, Barnes and Evequoz. The shift in the project happened after the first day, as more athletes began to come to paint and participate in the project. Roald Bradstock, the instigator of this project, (wearing his own artwork in unique hand painted clothes (aka nickname the 'Olympic Picasso'),) He noted that "this collaborative Olympic project focused on and celebrated the Olympic athlete, giving Olympians an opportunity to show their creative side, discuss Olympic values and ideals, and work together to show unity, respect, community and friendship. The projects are about combining the universal languages of sport and art - a project about Olympians, created by Olympians for Olympians." Unexpectedly many more countries including Italy, Poland and United States showed up to paint both before and after their own sport



competitions. Gold medalist Italian alpine downhill Sophia Goggia participated in the project along with other gold, silver and bronze medal winners.

The makeshift pavilion had athletes painting on the artwork day and night! The collaborative community began to paint their own official outfits with the hashtag #Olympicart. The artists built their own signage outside the pavilion to encourage and welcome athletes to participate in the Olympic Village, and to encourage and welcome athletes who may have feared they had no artistic talent. No one imagined the unique creative talent of superior athletes would translate onto the inspired

large canvas, which has moved to the Olympic Museum located in Switzerland permanently. Bradstock who has been instrumental in this movement has been competing internationally as a javelin thrower for 40 years. He competed in both the '84 and '88 Olympic Games, was an Olympic alternate in '92 and '96 and competed in 8 Olympic Trials - the last being in 2012 when he placed 2nd at the age of 50. He holds multiple World Records for throwing a wide range of objects from javelins to iPods to golf balls. In 2018 he won his first World Masters Championships aged 56. Sitting down for an intimate interview with this champion, he shined a light on the upcoming Olympic Games

and his goals to ensure "The Arts" are recognized and acknowledged for Japan 2020 and for the future generations.

**The World Olympians Association (WOA) have officially formed and now announced a new Arts Committee called "Oly Arts". You have been appointed Chair of the committee, could you tell us more about the role and the work Oly Arts will play in the Japan 2020 Olympics?** The formation of WOA Oly Arts Committee is a significant moment in Olympic history, as it fulfills part of IOC President Bach's, Agenda 2020 vision. The Oly Arts Committee will have direct input

in Olympic arts projects during the Tokyo 2020 Summer Olympic Games. The Committee will create, review ideas and consult on projects for Olympic athletes to participate in during the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games.

**Many people don't realize that there were 146 medalists in the art competitions that were part of the Olympic Games from 1912 until 1948. Do you think that the Modern Olympics will bring back the art medal?** I would love to see a competitive component in projects and activities we do going forward, after all Olympians are, by their very nature, competitive

creatures. Having an actual competition with medals being awarded could and should be something the Oly Arts Committee considers, especially if it seems like a good fit with the activity we develop. At this point everything and anything will be considered.

**The art competitions were considered an integral part of the movement for the IOC founder Pierre De Coubertin and were an attempt to recapture the essence of the Ancient Olympic Games, how do you see this today and the role of the arts within the Olympic Games?**



Most people today think of the Olympic Games as a huge sporting event. I see something very different: I see a giant sports and arts event. If you look at the Olympic Games, as I do, you will see that they are covered and smothered with art from the opening and closing ceremonies, that are huge theatrical musical and stage productions, to everything in between. Art and elements of art like color, color combinations, graphic designs, typography and fashion are everywhere communicating information about an athlete's country, to the amount of weight an athlete is lifting, to what sport they are competing in. I view basketball, soccer and volleyball players like actors, dancers and musicians that practice and rehearse moves, positions and places and have to work together for a successful outcome. When I watch wrestlers, fencers and boxers competing I see finely tuned athletes that are also incredibly creative in how they act and react to their opponent.

#### **What inspires you?**

Creativity, Talent, Skill, Competitiveness.

#### **Has art always been in your life as an influence?**

Yes. Sport and Art have always battled for my attention and time since I was a toddler.

#### **How has your personal taste changed over the years?**

It really hasn't. I have always been drawn to images that make me react either emotionally or physically. It's like a reflex.

#### **Who or what has been your greatest inspiration?**

I am inspired by people that change the way I and/or we see and experience the World. In the "Art World" my biggest inspiration is Jackson Pollock for creating a new way to paint and making and revealing "process" an art form itself (Performance Art). In the "Sports World" my biggest inspiration is 1968 Olympic Champion Dick Fosbury for creating a new technique in the high jump (the Fosbury Flop) which changed the event forever.

#### **You have documented athletes who have participated in the Olympics and have current or past careers as visual artists, could you speak to the work and share some of your artist discoveries with our audience?**

With over 100,000 living Olympians around the world, there is obviously a chance of finding a few artists. It took 10 years to find the first dozen Olympian artists and form Art of the Olympians. It took another decade to double that number again. When I took over as the Executive Director I more than doubled our membership to 60 in just one year because I looked! I believe there are 100's of Olympians artists out there and now with the formation of the Oly Arts Committee and the planned Arts Activities at future Olympic Games hopefully we will be able to find more of athlete-artists and other creative Olympians. These are a few names of the Olympian artists we have found Lanny Barnes, Kader Klouchi, Larry Young, Lucia Medzihradská, John Stillings, Allison Wagner, Wojciech Zablocki and more.

#### **What do you want viewers to know about OLY Arts mission and its future plans?**

Oly Arts mission is to help create a platform and opportunities for Olympians to express their creativity and show their artistic side. Going forward we plan to have activities at every Summer, Winter and Youth Olympic Games.