

‘Surround Yourself With What Makes You Happy!’ A Profile on Artist and Entrepreneur Margalit Romano



By Zoë Goetzmann

Such is the underlying statement and gallery tagline which has inspired New Jersey-based painter and mixed media artist Margalit Romano throughout this past year, creating work ranging from acrylic paintings, wall art, “functional art” as she refers to it, which includes serving ware, as well as, large-scale installations, all recognized by her signature bold and colorful aesthetic. A jack of all trades, Romano truly does it all: taking on the role of artist, entrepreneur, mother, a “warrior” (for women artists) as seen via her Instagram bio, as well as, most recently, gallery owner, presiding over her own physical gallery space located in Asbury, New Jersey - the title obtained from her Instagram handle “@margalit_arts” - which also represents the driving force and platform which helped to launch her career as a full-time working artist in 2012.



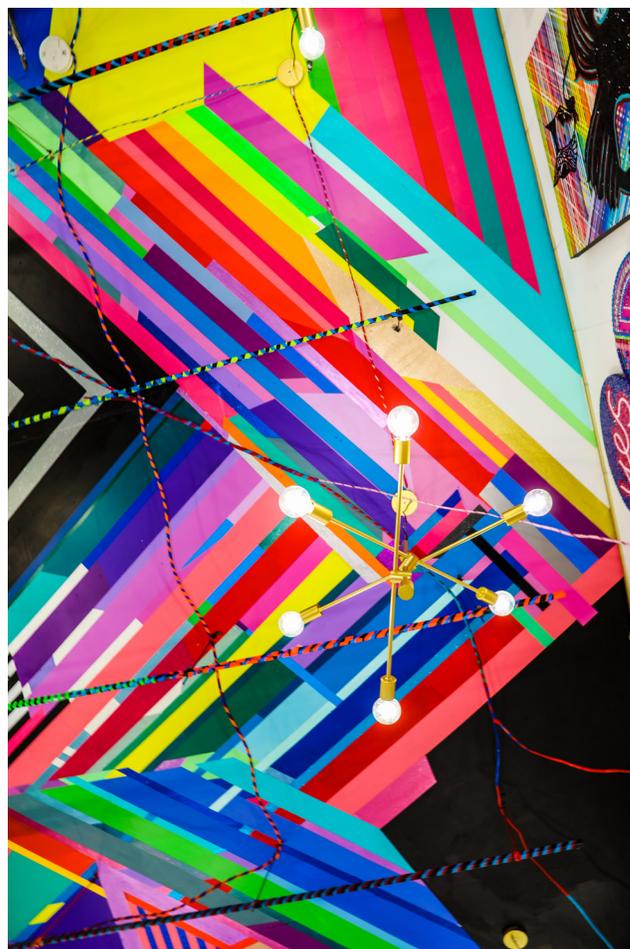
When it comes to her work, process and career, Romano is anything but traditional. A self-taught painter, her predominant mediums include acrylic paint, wood, canvas, resin as well as other mixed media materials such as glitter, jewels, spikes, studs and comic books. She draws inspiration from artists such as Sol LeWitt, Barbara Kruger, Damien Hirst as well as director-writer-animator Tim Burton, of whom she admires for his unconventionality and unwillingness to conform to traditional artistic standards.

“I remember reading something where a teacher told him [Tim Burton],” Romano recalls: “You’ll never be an artist,” she continues, “because [his] illustrations and his particular style [are not] ‘traditional.’” Titles such as *Enchanted Forest*, referring to Romano’s earlier work, consisting of a series of acrylic on wood pieces, conveys a similar whimsical, even ethereal sentiment to that of Burton’s.

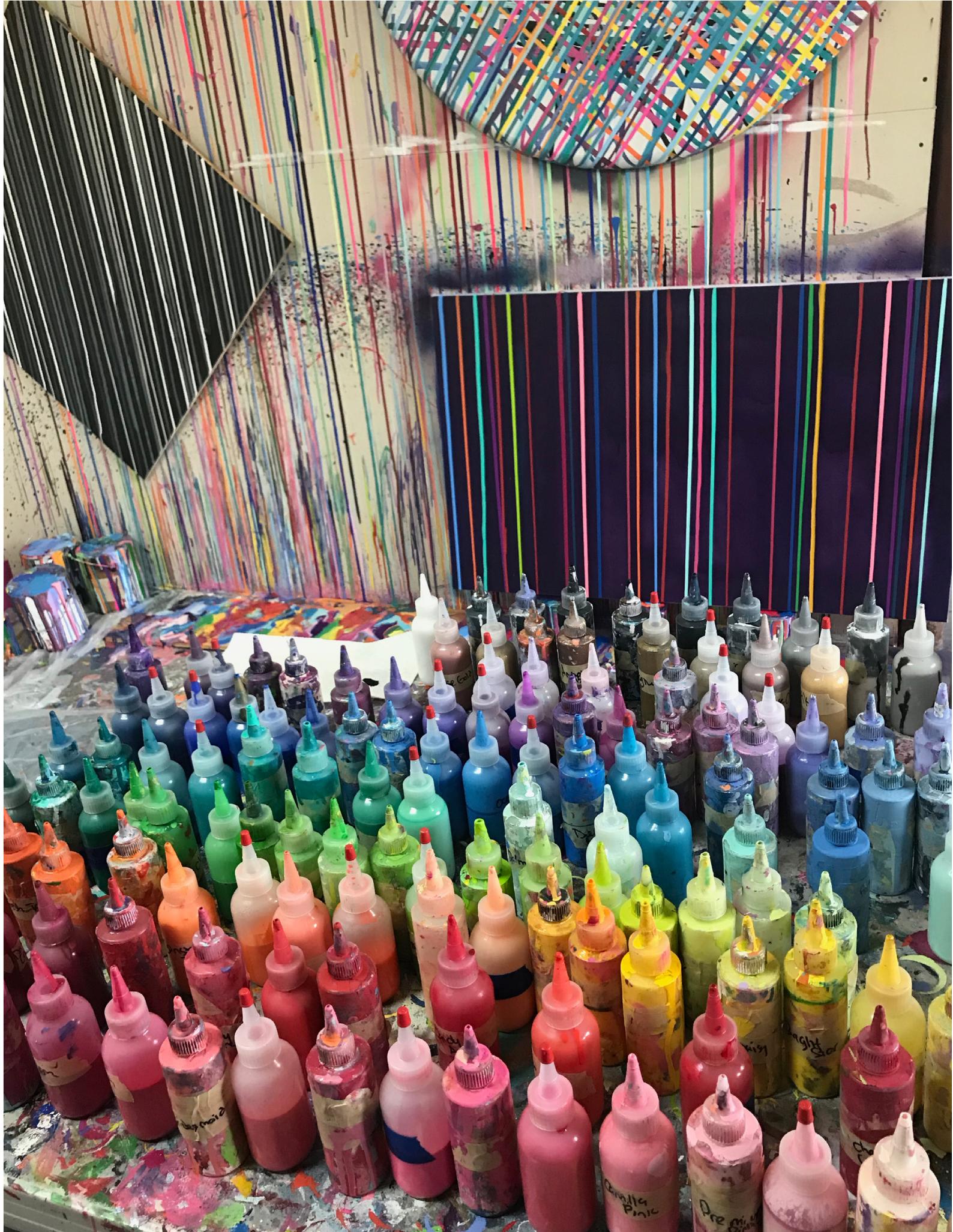
Although she cannot recall the first piece she ever made, Romano says that she does remember the first painting that she ever sold, “It [had] a marble look,” she explains, “I called them ‘galaxy paintings,’ because I just love how [much] they look like the night sky.” The series was produced in “three parts,” she adds and were later sold to a local restaurant in New Jersey.

Romano’s works are intensely colorful, emitting an immediate visual sense of positivity, strength, playfulness and ingenuity.

Her “Drip Stripe” paintings are amongst Romano’s most popular works. Seen most frequently on her Instagram, Romano documents her self-invented technique for her followers through uploaded photo and video content. To create one of her pieces, Romano says that she spends “the whole day” making her own acrylic paint mixture via, she explains, “trial and error,” ensuring that the liquid is “thick” [but] not translucent” as well as not “too watery.” Through this process, Romano is able to achieve, as she describes, a “mesmerizing” result, creating “beautiful line[s],” she adds, which are able to run smoothly down the surface of the canvas. A phenomenon that, even Romano admits, “makes no sense.”







“I kept playing with it [her ‘Drip Stripe’ technique] and I zeroed in on keeping the paint fluid, like a very organized chaos,” she notes, “I love it because it’s bringing together [the] fundamentals of a line [through] a very organic [process].”

In 2012, Romano started to post images of her work on her Instagram, (@margalit_arts) which now has a little over 23,000 followers, selling her work through Instagram art giveaways and local charity art auctions as a way to garner initial promotion and clientele.

“I started to make more of an effort to really think about what I was doing,” she explains, “I donated artworks to charities [and] that was really all my marketing back then,” Romano continues, “I did a good deed and I was able to be seen by a whole different audience. It was a lot of ‘hustle’ and [being] creative and just getting my work out there.” Currently, she ships to customers located in New Jersey, New York City, California, Chicago, Florida and Ohio, selling her works for prices between \$100 to upwards of \$9,000, depending on the size of the work and the specific commission.

For Romano, her work is all about accessibility, straying from the traditional, “hoity toity,” as she describes, artist and gallery relationship and model. This approach also underlines the reason as to why she works in a variety of different mediums.

“It’s all about making [the] artwork more approachable,” she explains, “when you surround yourself with things that make you happy, it really affects you, your mood and your whole essence and I really just want to get more [artwork] out there anyway [that] I can,” she continues, “to really surround yourself with artwork [to the point] where it’s not this ‘untouchable’ thing.”

Although this year has been bittersweet for Romano with the passing of her father, she has undoubtedly taken her gallery’s tagline - “Surround Yourself With What Makes You Happy!” - into account, realizing her dream of opening her own gallery, “@margalit_arts” this past February.

“It just magically fell into place,” she recalls, “I think once you mentally prepare and you’re ready, you can actively take those steps, because it’s not realistic to just jump into something or to overly plan sometimes,” she says, “you can’t always force that.” Such an approach is similar to the way that Romano creates one of her “Drip Stripe” paintings, executing each work through a natural, even “organic,” as she refers to above, method, whilst also applying a certain level of entrepreneurial skill and business-savvy to help transform her visions into a reality.

The gallery represents both a physical and a “literal,” as she describes, extension of her Instagram, offering visitors an immersive artistic experience, through which, Romano has adorned its walls with her signature artworks, departing from the traditional, white wall gallery setting.

“I created an immersive art experience,” Romano says, “It’s not just a gallery with white walls, I painted the ceiling [and] any surface that [didn’t] have art hanging on it. It [just] has my flair,” she continues, “it’s just a fun space [where] I [just] wanted to play with the whole idea that everything is social.” At present, Romano plans to exhibit three or four shows per year, suggesting an “Artist Ambassador Program,” where visitors or other outside individuals can act as brokers or agents for potential artists and artworks.

When asked if she would ever curate an exhibition for artists who promote and sell artwork on Instagram, she replies, “I love the community vibe [on Instagram] and I’m definitely open to something like that [but] I don’t want to turn into a traditional gallery.” Such parameters differentiate Romano’s career from the pre-established art world mould.

As both a working female artist and a mother, Romano reflects on the stigma which often surrounds each of these roles, highlighting the importance of a solid work and life balance.

“People don’t necessarily take you seriously as a woman artist [or a working mother] because they think you’re just ‘crafting’ [with your kids],” she says, “there’s always a constant struggle for balance, no matter if you have a job or you don’t a job,” she continues, “people are always struggling for balance, but the whole thing with balance is going with the ebb and flow of life.”

Romano applies this way of thinking to her overall Instagram presence, reflecting on the negativity often observed through this specific platform. As she details, “Art is very personal. I know for myself, I [used to receive] so many negative comments [and] it can be discouraging,” she notes, “but you just have to keep going and be true to yourself.”

This advice also proves useful when dealing with clients, highlighting the importance of compromise when it comes to this specific relationship:

“I literally tell clients who are commissioning a piece,” Romano explains, “I can tell you [the client] I love it, but, you’re the one that has to live with it.” As she continues, “So, if you don’t like it, [please] tell me, I’m not offended, I want you to love it.”

Interestingly, her approach to art and business echoes Pop artist Ashley Longshore who initially started to use Instagram as a way to promote her work in 2012, and has been featured most recently in the New York Times in 2018 (and in Create! Magazine in 2013 and in 2019), collaborated with luxury fashion brands and designers such as Gucci – as of last year – as well as even manages her own self-titled gallery, Ashley Longshore Gallery located in New Orleans, Louisiana. Thus far, Romano appears to be poised on a similar career path.

In the long-term future, Romano aspires to delve into more brand collaborations, developing capsule collections in fashion, makeup and interior design. She also hopes to “license” her designs so that they can be used on, as she explains, “different surfaces,” apart from her wall art pieces. In the more distant future, Romano dreams of opening a “maker’s space,” imagining “a building where the whole outside [is] painted,” she details, “where the first floor is a gallery and then the second floor is a shared space for artists where they can use machinery, materials and [take] woodworking workshops.”

Finally, it is without question that Romano’s drive and work ethic resonates with the overall message which Create! [Magazine] strives to convey to its readers and followers: stay positive, avoid the negative (comparisons) and always keep creating artwork (regardless of barriers)!

