

## A Sense of Abundance by Fernando Botero

Years ago on Maui, I was introduced to the voluminous sculptures of Colombian artist Fernando Botero. There was a traveling exhibit at the Grand Wailea Hotel and with one look, I was both infatuated and curious. I wanted to know why his sculptures amplified the shapes and sizes of both humans and animals. Yes, they were “plus size” even before the expression was popularized by the media. There were cats, dogs, horses, children, reclining women, men standing or on horseback, and all with an expression of mirth or contemplativeness.

To be in the presence of these sculptures in Medellin, Colombia and to spend time with them revealed more than just corpulent, overfed figures. In the presence of these giants, I saw something I never expected to see. After spending several hours looking and walking around each of the 23 sculptures under different lighting conditions that the early morning brought, and then doing the same thing over and over again, I understood what Botero was saying about his art when he said, “I paint volumes, I don’t paint fat people.”

He is quoted as saying that “I was interested in expanding form—in giving physical presence, sensuality, and monumentality to people, animals, and objects.” Some art critics claim that his use of volume created a sense of abundance and vitality, a celebration of form itself.

In the early morning, I was among dozens of homeless vagrants, panhandlers, and hookers. The street people had spent the night camped out among the giants. In the early morning, they were in their elements and were highly visible. Some were screaming indecipherable mumblings and others talking aloud to no one in particular. Others were in various stages of dress. One lady was partially nude and dancing around a similarly “nude” sculpture.

As the lighting conditions changed with the rising sun, so did the size and composition of the crowd. By midmorning, scores of foreign tourists vied for photographic space in front the sculptures, all of which were donated to his hometown by Botero. The plaza is now named after him.

Now the street peoples’ presence seemed to blend in with the crowd and became blurred, less apparent, almost invisible. The police were now everywhere and made

their presence known. It was a contrast to earlier in the morning when none were in sight.

Travel guides recommend that visitors arrive after ten in the morning and leave before dusk. The street people would then reclaim their turf when the evening shadows once again returned ownership to the homeless and the drifters. The evenings with the giants would once again be theirs.

Fernando Botero was often described as a gentle and warm human being, a man of wit and confidence who grew up in poverty, but who showed his talent of observation and curiosity. That he was disciplined in his art forms has resulted in these gifts to the world. We are the recipients of his legacy... a giant like his abundant sculptures.

That Earle, brother  
Plaza Botero  
Medellin, Colombia