



## Gregory Burns Athlete and Artist

In a world where sports and the arts often seem so very far apart, Gregory Burns proves daily that the two can co-exist at the highest levels. Mr. Burns is a world champion swimmer who has won gold medals in the Paralympic Games. He is also a world-class contemporary artist, whose painting exhibits have been sponsored internationally by the likes of Rolex, Nike and BMW.

Polio, a disease long considered eradicated in the United States, is what put Gregory Burns in a position to pursue his remarkable dual career. A child of U.S. Foreign Service parents, Burns contracted the disease when they served in the Middle East during the late 1950s. Since then, he has used crutches and braces to shore up polio-weakened legs, which have swum him to the gold medal platforms from Barcelona to Atlanta to Sydney and beyond.

So Gregory Burns is, in fact, an old-fashioned hero. He is the sort of exemplary role model that one usually encounters only in Hollywood films, not in real life.

Though diagnosed with polio at the age of ten months, Burns has not allowed the disease to darken the colours of his life or palette. "When I was a kid, by an interesting twist of fate, I was able to swim in the White House pool in Washington D.C. and suddenly, I was taking swimming lessons in the President's pool and playing Cowboys and Indians with the secret service."

Worldwide travel is one of his true joys. As Burns notes, "I have become much more mobile than many other people because I've always had the urge to travel and do what others thought I couldn't accomplish."

"After one year of pre-law in college,



I packed up my things and drove across the USA, stopping at the Grand Canyon. Not knowing any better, I set off down the Kaibab Trail, with a pack of peanuts and a canteen of water. Reaching the Colorado River seven hours later, I was dehydrated and almost passed out before being given some water by a thoughtful hiker."

He has specialized in painting contemporary pieces that explore the landscapes and architectural images that he has observed on his extensive travels throughout Asia, Europe and the Americas. "I have climbed many of the world's impressive mountains. During the 80's and 90's I successfully reached the summits of Jade Mountain in Taiwan and Mount Kinabalu in Sabah, twice hiked down and out of the Grand Canyon in Arizona, reached the Nanga Prabat base camp in Pakistan, hiked to Namche Bazaar on route to the Mount Everest base camp in Nepal and scaled numerous other mountains in the USA, India, and Europe. From hiking canyons, I graduated to running marathons. In 1983, I hopped the Honolulu Marathon and came in dead last. Sixteen hours after the start of the race, I crossed the finish line. I later used a wheelchair to compete in the 1987 and 1988 Taipei, Taiwan marathons, clocking times below three hours. The hardest part of these marathons was needing to carry my wheelchair on my shoulders and head as I drove my motorcycle from home to the starting point."

Burns enjoys body boarding in the waves of Bali, Hawaii and California. He's a certified PADI scuba diver and has dived in most of the world's oceans, believing water is the great equalizer and a unique sanctuary.

"My serious swimming career started in 1977 after moving to California. I set world records in events in England, Canada and Brazil. In Barcelona, during the 1992 Paralympics, I set

the world record in the 100m breast-stroke, and won Silver and Bronze medals. After training with Singapore coach Ang Peng Siong for the 1996 Atlanta Paralympics, I set three new world records and captured two Gold medals and one Silver. My performance during the 2000 Sydney Paralympics was not up to expectations, so I have fixed my sights on the Athens Paralympics in 2004 to redeem myself."

Burns moved to Asia in 1984 in an effort to escape the rampant consumerism of American society and to study the Chinese arts of brush painting, calligraphy and seal carving. He has traveled extensively in the region, by bus, boat, train and foot in search of spiritual rejuvenation. He has developed an interest in sacred places and endeavours to reflect this growing spiritual depth in his paintings. His subject matter includes both man-made and natural spaces - temples, ashrams, churches, cathedrals, Zen gardens, pagodas, cave dwellings and other sacred sites.

Quoting Panofsky, Burns says "The physical 'brightness' of a work of art will 'brighten' the minds of the beholders by a spiritual illumination." He sees his paintings thus 'brightening' the minds and hearts of his audience.

His website can be visited at: [www.gregoryburns.com](http://www.gregoryburns.com).

