

BEST CHUTZPAH

Jeffrey Berkowitz

For some unfathomable reason, developer Jeffrey Berkowitz wants to inflict on South Florida more so-called art from Romero Britto, as if Britto's infantile decorations weren't already ubiquitous. Berkowitz and partner Alan Potamkin are about to begin construction of a cramped shopping mall and parking garage at the main entrance to Miami Beach — Fifth Street and Alton Road. A big project like that will spin off substantial money intended for the city's Art in Public Places program (AIPP). Normally the AIPP committee would decide how that construction surtax would be spent and where the resulting art would end up. Berkowitz had a better idea: He'd commission Britto to produce a monumental piece of "art" for his project, which would become the de facto welcoming symbol for visitors to Miami Beach. Not surprisingly the AIPP committee cried foul. Berkowitz sneered: It's my project and my money and I'll do what I want with it. And if the city doesn't like it, *tough*. Tough indeed. Berkowitz had made a deal whereby he'd sell the potentially lucrative parking garage to Miami Beach at cost. But the committee's snobbish, elitist resistance to Britto led the developer to threaten to break that deal, keep the garage himself, reduce its size, and add more retail space. How's *that* for (infantile) chutzpah?