

Artist to Collect
Bruno Capolongo



Penthouse Affair



Living a dream

written by Debra Usher

Inspired by beauty, encaustic painter Bruno Capolongo is living his dream life. He has a sun-filled studio, spends his days working with passion and relaxes with fine wines and chocolates.

The Hamilton native is of Italian descent. Although his parents were initially reluctant to support his artistic career, they quickly became such staunch supporters that they built a studio for him when he was just a teenager, a place that was his haven for years.

Today, Bruno makes his home in Niagara's wine region. His spacious studio is where he spends much of his time when he's not teaching or curating. It is also where his Capolongo's Encaustic Mediums are made. Encaustic is a

paint consisting of pigment mixed with beeswax and fixed with heat after its application.

He considers himself very fortunate to work with some of the finest art galleries in North America, including establishments in Toronto, Montreal and New York City.

"That I have been pursued by galleries of such calibre has been very flattering," Bruno says. He has been awarded multiple Elizabeth Greenshields grants, which are financial awards given to artists in the early stages of their careers who are working in a representational style.

Bruno's concern with achieving a fine balance between historic and contemporary influences makes his work interesting.

"This means that my work is a blending of many styles and techniques that make for paintings that



left, Sugar, Sugar
right, Eye Candy (Tiramisu)

top left, Cherry Drip
bottom left, When the Chocolate Drips
right, Eye Candy (Triple Mousse)

are, hopefully, aesthetically powerful and unique in their contemporary edge. Also, there are often layers of depth to the work that are subtle, not only in the surface of the paint, but also with respect to content and concept, like the works that have a subtle narrative."

Need for change

He admits to having an incessant need for challenge and change. "I am never content to really know how something is painted, but I am constantly evolving in my techniques or approach, rarely doing something the same way twice, to the point that I sometimes think that I don't know how to paint at all, which in turn keeps me striving."

He concentrates on still life and landscapes since both pose a similar challenge, he says. The task for the serious contemporary artist is to paint landscape and still-life in a manner that

stands out and contributes to the progress of painting in our time. Bruno subscribes to no fixed technique and says he is always driven by design and execution.

"For example, many paintings have started as Mondrian-like abstracts, exercises in balance, colour and light and often texture," he says. Mondrian was a Dutch painter (1872-1944) whose work intersecting lines at right angles and planes in primary colours influenced the development of abstract art.

Bruno then introduces recognizable object matter to anchor the work, giving context. He states, "To my mind, such works are not simply pictures, but five-sided objects best experienced in-the-round, like sculpture, which is why it is difficult to fully appreciate them when reproduced on the printed page, or Internet."

He says the commitment involved in the creation is his most exciting task. However, he gets quite restless once work slows down and becomes tedious. He admits he is inclined toward obsessing over detail.

"I have struggled to free myself from this inclination toward detail for many years,

recognizing that describing or rendering detail is not necessary – to suggest detail is enough."

With the possible exception of paintings in the Eye Candy series, each piece is a little different in how it comes to life, Bruno explains. "But from painting to painting one constant is my indebtedness to masters of previous generations. Often my palette is quite influenced by or even derived from these earlier painters and even artisans working in metal, glass and other mediums."

Theatre of still life

Bruno makes sure he uses objects and forms that he feels strongly about. "In still life, for example, my appreciation for the elegance of Ming Dynasty porcelain vases and other Asian pottery is clear. These usually constitute the focal point of the artwork. The other objects are then chosen for their complementary interaction with the main object, which can be quite surprising. To me, composing and lighting a still life is much like good theatre. The setting is the stage, main objects are the actors and others are props. Bringing it all to life is the drama of

light. I often spend much time in deciding how best to light a still-life because there is plenty of expressive power in light and shadow. Colour too, is affected by lighting."

Once decided, Bruno typically paints in a very direct manner. He uses translucent and opaque colour as efficiently as possible, working from dark to light. He usually begins with an imprimatura, which also acts as a mid-tone, and brings unity to the entire painting. Imprimatura is an initial stain of colour painted on a surface. It provides a painter with a transparent toned surface, which will allow light falling onto the painting to reflect through the paint layers. The term itself stems from the Italian and literally means "first paint layer".

Before building his current studio, he enjoyed a space that most artists would consider fantastic – nearly the entire lower level of his

home. However, over time, he found he needed improved natural light and a studio that felt distanced from the house.

"My new studio is a 735-square-foot addition, an entirely new wing that has been added to the house. This studio has changed my life as an artist, and has been worth every penny invested. The upper level has a cathedral ceiling with skylights, and great light from every direction

1,400 square feet of workspace, but effectively beautified the area as well, making it a pleasant place to spend my days."

He says he is inspired by those things which are well crafted and beautifully proportioned. "I am a hopeless aesthete."

Perhaps more than anything else, the greatest influences on his work in recent years are various movements in the fine arts, architecture, crafts



Lilies (Homage to Tiffany)

except the east side, which constitutes my main painting wall for very large works."

Spectacular studio

The lower level now contains a full workshop, prop room, large work area, an area for four pullout walls on tracks for art inventory, spray room and storage spaces. Especially wonderful for Bruno, is a main window overlooking a classical reflecting pool and fountain, with its central statue – a main feature in the overall studio project. The house and studio now form a courtyard with the pool as the focal point.

"The entire project did more than give me

and design fields that almost invariably fall within the era known as La Belle Epoque (the Beautiful Era). This era, also called "the Gilded Age" in America, began around the late 1800s and ended in the early 1900s.

"It is this period that left us with the treasures of the Arts and Crafts movement, Art Nouveau, and the rise of Aestheticism as a movement in art," he says. "Many of the world's most breathtaking paintings were created at this time. It is the closest we've come to an artistic renaissance since the European renaissance of centuries ago."

For inspiration, Bruno keeps a great collection



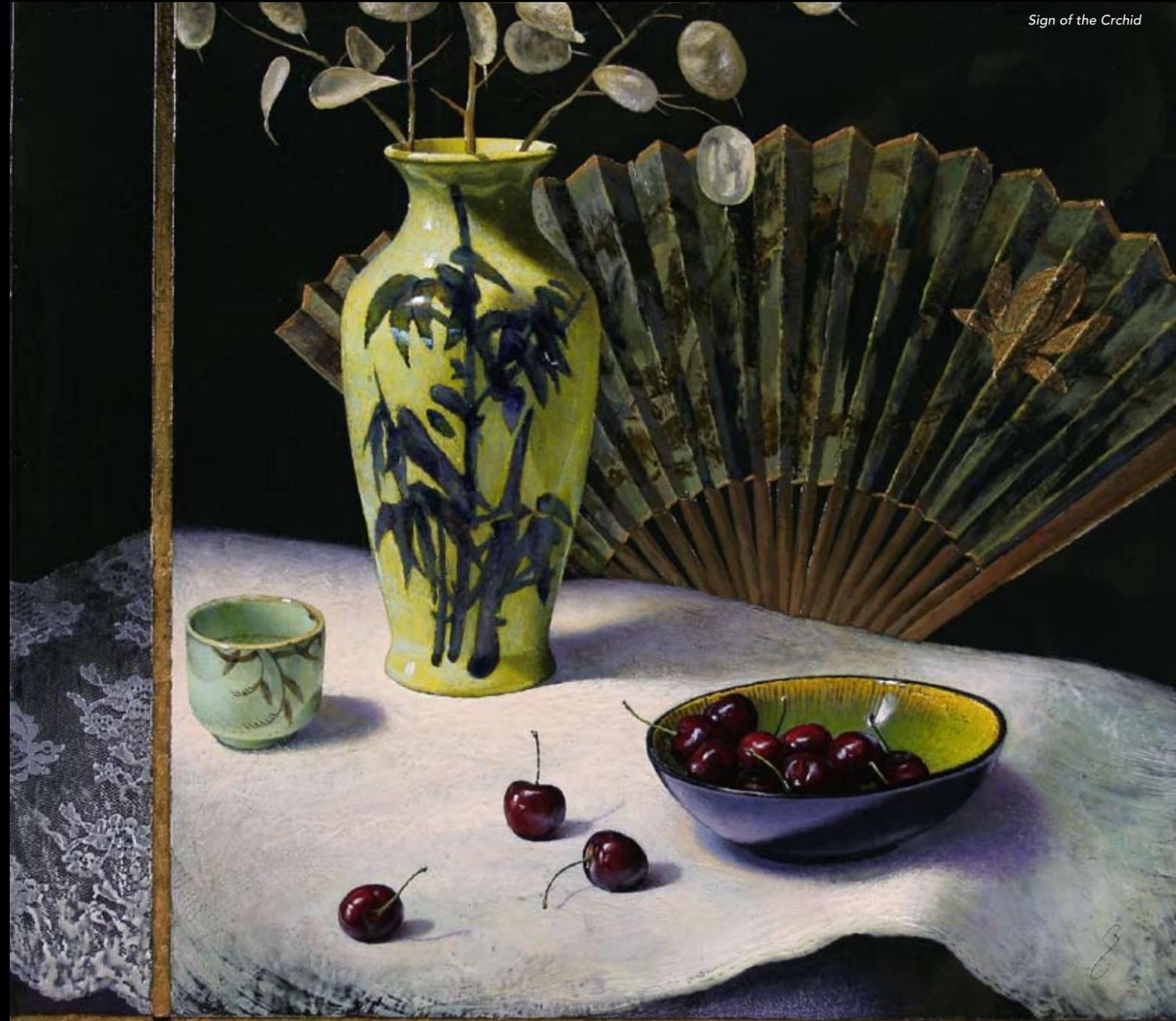
Vessels



Duplicity



The Virgin Bride



Sign of the Crchid

of art books in his studio. Many of these are monograms, some on relatively less known masters of 19th century American and European painting.

When studying other artists, he's usually taken by those who are not merely interested in rendering what's before them, but rather those whose subjects have been artistically interpreted.

"What I mean is that there are those who are very talented in a technical way, and then there are those who take their craft further and filter things artistically so that what they paint has a life all its own. By so doing these artists represent even the common and familiar with a profoundly heightened aesthetic. Unlike those who are simply content to render minute detail or are stuck in a rigid, academic mode of painting, such artists do not merely see with, but through their eyes."

History important in art

He is excited by contemporary artists who successfully balance modern and classical sensibilities with a concern for excellence in craft and beauty. As he remarks, "The most intelligent and successful artists draw from two sources of artistic influence, the well of history and the fountain of modernity."

The late Carol Wald (1935-2001) is an example of an artist who Bruno believes succeeded in creating extraordinary work that was rooted in a great artistic heritage, yet decidedly modern.

He teaches encaustic painting at the Dundas Valley School of Art and advanced painting at Redeemer University (both schools are in southern Ontario), so he's always working, even when not creating. Two of his favourite pastimes are travelling through the US and discovering its galleries and museums and spending time with his wife and two daughters.

He advises new artists to be patient. "Artistic excellence is arrived at by degrees, so endurance is essential. Learning a fine craft takes time. Be prepared for a learning curve of years to master a medium or technique."

Consider exploring other types of art and materials, he adds.

When Bruno wants to paint casually he uses oils, but when he wants to explore wonderful translucency, textures and to literally play with fire,



Morning Mist



The Golden Hour



Water Snakes



The Golden Age



Blue Jar with Chinese Lanterns



Urn, Quince and Pence

he picks up his encaustic medium and his torch.

"I am known to many people as an encaustic painter and the popularity of my encaustic paintings and classes is due to the fact that I've pushed the medium to do what some consider impossible."

He began signing his artwork at age seven, intent on making it his life's work. By 12 he had begun to study painting with a Czech artist, received his first institutional commission and took a lengthy trip to Italy to study many of its treasures of art and architecture, as well as his own cultural roots.

"The impact of that period can't be overstated, and the time in Italy inspired me to a second solo trip years later, where I studied art in the museums, palaces, and churches of Rome, Florence and Naples. It was during this second trip that the importance of craftsmanship and beauty was cemented in my consciousness. These two trips were as important as the education in art I received at the three art schools I attended between 1990 and 1998, culminating in my graduation with a Master of Fine Arts in Visual Art degree from Vermont College of Fine Arts in the US"

Most of what he does in the studio are self-directed projects, but he now accepts commissions more readily than in the past. One recent commission in 2009 was of a beautiful celebrity from East Asia.

He enjoys Thai dishes and admits to a very sweet tooth, preferring fine dark chocolate with cream centres and cherry cordials, which he enjoys daily. He's a fan of Niagara wines and one of his favourites is Malivoire's 2007 Gamay Noir. He says Angel's Gate Winery from Niagara produces fantastic wines. Most wines in his home are either Italian or Canadian.

Lo Presti's at Maxwell's in Hamilton, Ontario is his favourite restaurant. It incorporates fine Mediterranean cuisine with an elegant, intimate atmosphere.

"I consider myself to be living my dream – to live and work in the same place, which affords me much time with my family."

Bruno Capolongo has created a dream-like lifestyle full of elegance and beauty.