



The Color of Love: From Broken Heart to Beautiful Art

by Nicola Burnell



Marie Canaves in her home studio

Art is the manifestation of emotion, often inspired by the simplest of moments from daily life. But when an artist feels so moved to complete sixteen pieces, in a single year, the magic of transformation is guiding the work.

In her recent exhibit *Endless Possibilities*, held at the Studio on Slough Road, artist Marie Canaves pays homage to her long-time partner, Alicia Sanchez. The show's pieces depict bold and colorful interpretations of Alicia's life-long struggles with various areas in her life, ranging from poor health to the oppression of the Catholic church.

"The genesis for the show had to do with the whole notion that as much as we may try, we may not always succeed," explains Marie. "A lot of people have a false sense of how much we can control in our lives. We just can't control a lot of things, no matter what we do."

Marie had met Alicia in middle school. They were together for 40 years. "When Alicia passed away, in May 2008, I hadn't done a body of work, ever." Although she'd been drawing and painting her whole life, Marie had never been moved to create a show to exhibit. That is until Kate Sidwell, who saw one of Marie's drawings at the Chalkboard Studio, invited her to show at her Studio on Slough Road.

Faced with the task of producing an exhibit, Marie considered her theme. "I decided the show was to honor Alicia's struggle. I wanted to acknowledge the incredible courage that she had; her tenacity, brilliance and wit. She was like a Joan of Arc – a real hero."

Marie didn't want the show to be a depressing exhibit, with pieces so difficult to look at that people wouldn't be able to appreciate them. "I wanted it to be beautiful to look at, but I also wanted it to be suggestive of what her struggle was."



Acrobat oil on vellum, 21 x30"

Traditionally trained in grisaille, using pencil and charcoal, finding the right medium to express Alicia's love for color pushed Marie out of her comfort zone. "I'm not a colorist. But Alicia was about color, so I had to make the effort."

Marie decided to apply high quality oil sticks to synthetic vellum. "I thought this would be a good transition because I wouldn't be using a pencil, or charcoal, but I'd be using oil sticks that I could manipulate in a similar way."

Inspired by their shared passion for vintage movie posters, Marie depicted, in vibrant color, the various metaphors Alicia often used to describe her life-long struggles. "She always said she felt she had to be a magician in order to maintain any kind of balance in her life," Marie recalls. "She'd say 'I feel like I have to pull rabbits out of a hat,' or 'I feel I have to twist myself into a pretzel, like a contortionist,' or 'I have to always be juggling things.'"



Bag of Tricks, oil on vellum, 36x55"

Alicia was also known for her love of doing magic tricks. "She just got such a thrill out of it." For Bag of Tricks, Marie researched posters and magic sets of the 50's and 60's and included some of those images in the piece.

These poster-like paintings show simplified forms in bold, flat areas of color. The piece that Marie feels most captures Alicia's struggle is The House of Cards, the largest painting in the show. "It's hard for me to look at that piece," she admits.



House of Cards, oil on vellum, 36x72"

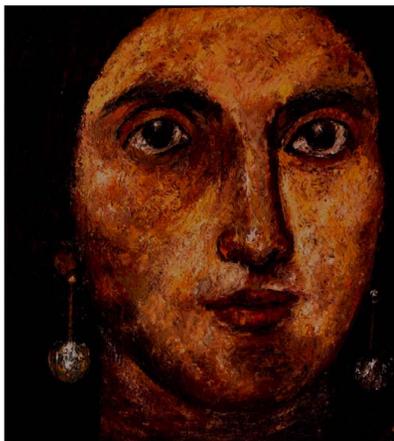
Despite the darkness and pain that plagued Alicia's life, the artwork Marie produced to represent her journey is filled with color and light. "That's because, in spite of all of that, she had this tremendous love of life. Alicia sparkled with magic, she really did."

Prior to the artwork she produced for this show, Marie had felt most comfortable working with paints, pencils and encaustics; an ancient technique of blending pigments with hot beeswax.

"I LOVE encaustics! What a wonderful technique." She had become interested in this technique during the 1990's, after meeting an artist at the College Art Association, who became the owner of R&F Handmade Paints. "I was blown away by the quality of the pigments."

Marie did include some of her encaustic work in the Endless Possibilities show. Eldemira, The Gypsy, for example, was inspired by Faiyum portraits, which feature extreme close-up and huge staring eyes.

This funerary portrait tradition dates back to 2nd century Egypt. "The Faiyum portraitists basically used four different colors and special tools that have now, for the first time since the ancient world, been recreated by R&F Handmade Paints," she explains. "This gives the same surface quality they got back then – translucencies, transparencies and opacities that you can't get with any other technique."



Eldemira, The Gypsy encaustics on panel, 12x11 ¾"

Her encaustic portraits appear somber and soulful in comparison to the vibrant color of the magic-themed pieces. "Every time you see color in my work it's all Alicia. She shaped my life in such a wonderful way – the best parts of me are from my relationship with her."

The loss of her partner has triggered in Marie a fresh new perspective on who she is as an artist and where she hopes to take her work. Marie's use of color for her Endless Possibilities exhibit has inspired her to incorporate more color into her encaustics work too. "I want to stay with the four more muted colors for the flesh tones, but the backgrounds and the accessories will be different. I'm thinking of using some gold leaf and some beautiful, rich deep purples and reds for the garments."

Marie, who was born in Havana, Cuba, fled from the Communist Revolution and settled in Miami, has a BFA in Painting from Florida International University, and a Masters in Art History from Southern Methodist University, in Dallas, Texas. She considers her real artistic training occurred, however, when she learned the techniques of the Old Masters from Roberto Martinez, a modern-day Renaissance artist who studied at Accademia di Brera, in Milan. "Studying with Roberto was like studying with an old Master – he taught me everything."

Now working as a tenured professor of Art and Art History at Cape Cod Community College, Marie enjoys taking sabbaticals to pursue her love of the Old Masters. She studied in Europe in 1995 and 1996, where she spent time copying original drawings of the Old Masters in the Drawing Room of the Uffizi in Florence and in the British Museum of Art in London.

"Copying the Old Masters is a really excellent way to learn. You're in these drawing rooms with other scholars and artists. It was a sacred experience to be able to study them like that. Their depth of knowledge, the spirituality of their work, the tremendous skill that they brought to their craft is unmatched, unparalleled."

Next summer, Marie plans to go to the National Museum of Capodimonte, in Naples, which has a Raphael cartoon and a Michelangelo cartoon that Roberto said she can't die without seeing. She is also going to study the mosaics of Ravenna. "One of the blessings of being a tenured professor is that you have time to do your work outside of school. This gives me my summers off to go study wherever I want to study."

Marie is back at work in her home studio, in Brewster, where the Endless Possibilities work can be viewed, by appointment. She is currently exhibiting work at the Cape Cod Community College faculty show from November 21st through December 12th.

She will also be exhibiting at the Cape Cod Cultural Center in the March 2012 as part of the Mutual Muses V.

To learn more about Marie Canaves visit her [website](#).

To schedule an appointment to see her work email her mlcanaves@gmail.com

Nicola Burnell is the Publisher and a contributing writer for this magazine. She teaches novel writing and creativity development classes, Reiki and Personal Empowerment workshops. She is also a member in Letters of the National League of American Pen Women.

Nicola is offering her own writing retreats at [Casa della Quercia](#), an historic villa in Northern Tuscany, beginning May 2012.

Nicola lives in Harwich with her two sons and several pets. Visit her [blog](#) or [Email](#) her.