

The 800th painting

I know, it's not noticeable, particularly when one knows that Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675) painted only 35 oil on canvas in his entire life (only masterpieces) and that, according to their galleries, K... or W... are making 500 originals (?) a year.

I signed opus #1 (the 20 previous trials didn't count) on July 13th, 1976, so, it's not a lot, even when working 340 days a year (OK, I'm also working as manager, accountant, driver, seller, warehouse keeper, in charge of packaging and shipping, PR, webmaster...) but the traditional oil painting process has some imperatives. And it's definitively (after 33 years) my way.

The making of painting #800

I got the idea of a Venitian palace on the background with divers in colored garments, something different than my signature blue character. In the same time, I had the idea of a kind of camouflage where fishes will wear dark wetsuit and divers colored fish attire. In the past, I made many Venitian paintings (it's The City of my heart), sometime underwater, and a few paintings with colored costumes.

As always with the idea, came the size of the final canvas, about 24x30, eventually 24x36 inches.

I started working on it under a temporary title: *Carnavale*. Most of the time, the title comes with the idea, sometime, it's the idea. But in this case, I changed the title, later, to "*Commedia dell'arte*".

Right now, I can't find the sketch I'm used to draw to fix the idea, usually no more than 2 inches.

(pic 1: sketches waiting on the wall of my office.)

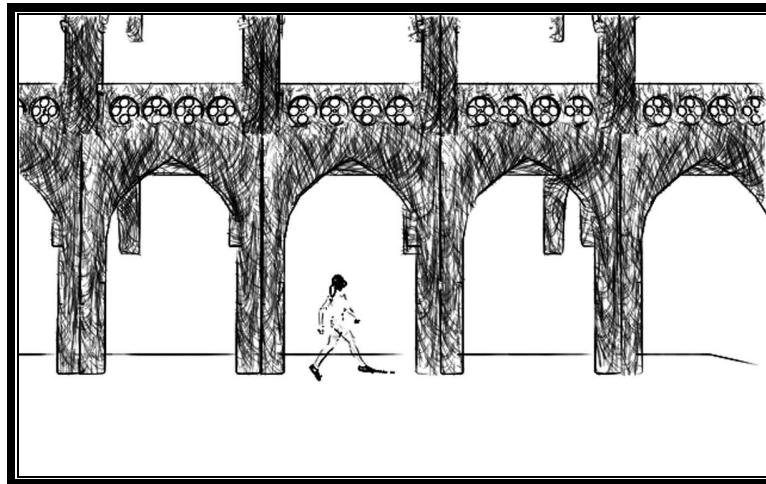


I have almost 2000 of them. Thank you, I don't need ideas, I'm full for the next 50 years.

Idea and first sketch should have been done on July 2005.

Looking for documentation, doing new sketches are always the gestation period in my process. I have sketches dated from May, Sept and Dec 2006.

(pic 2: sketch, 2006).



By the way, instead of the idea to use the Doge's Palace as the background, I moved to the building just in front of it, the Library. The *Libreria* is less known than the *Palazzo dei Dogi*, so I thought it's was more accurate to my project as I moved to the idea, not to paint carnival costumes – really Venitian stuff – but more Italian performance clothes from the *Commedia dell' arte*.

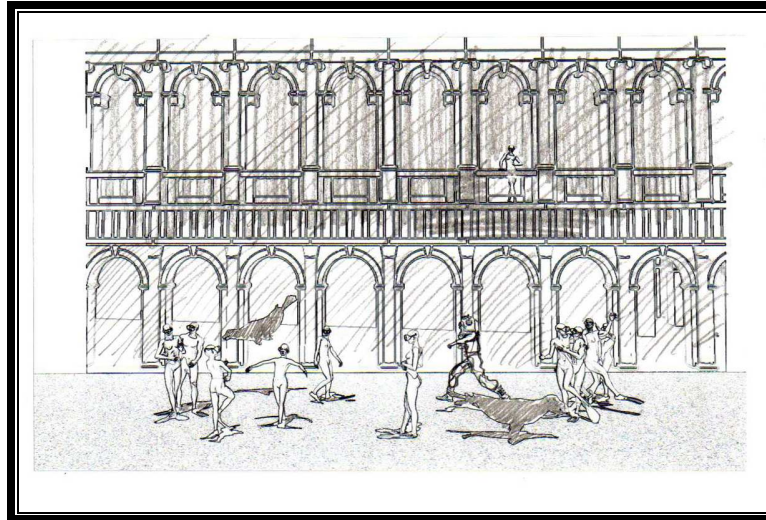
(pic 3: documents about costumes and architecture).



I was not intended to do this “making off”, so I didn' t take particularly pics of the process or kept the schedule of it. I didn' t know either that it will be the 800th painting, as I'm always working on several pieces at the same time.

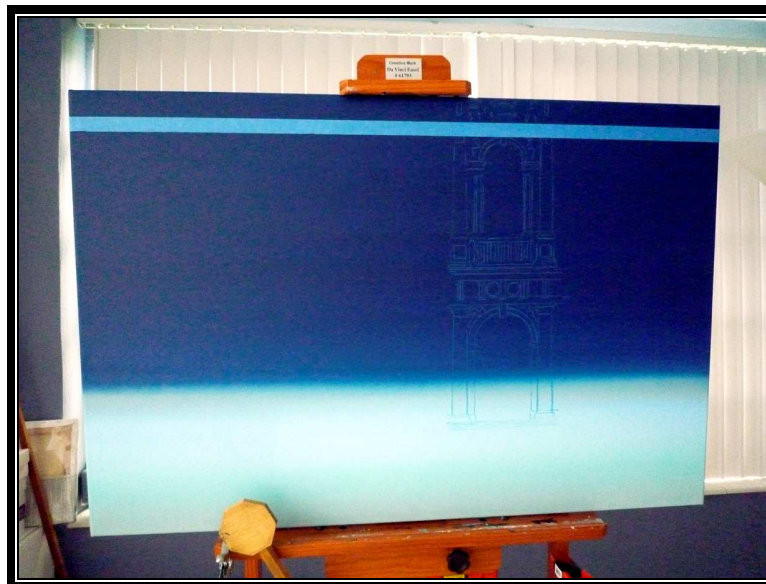
On my walls today are 17 works in progress, some of them will be unveiled Nov 2010 at the Dema show in Las Vegas where I'm used to exhibit my production of the year, some will be ready for Nov 2011 for the show in Orlando.

(pic 4: final drawing of the characters)



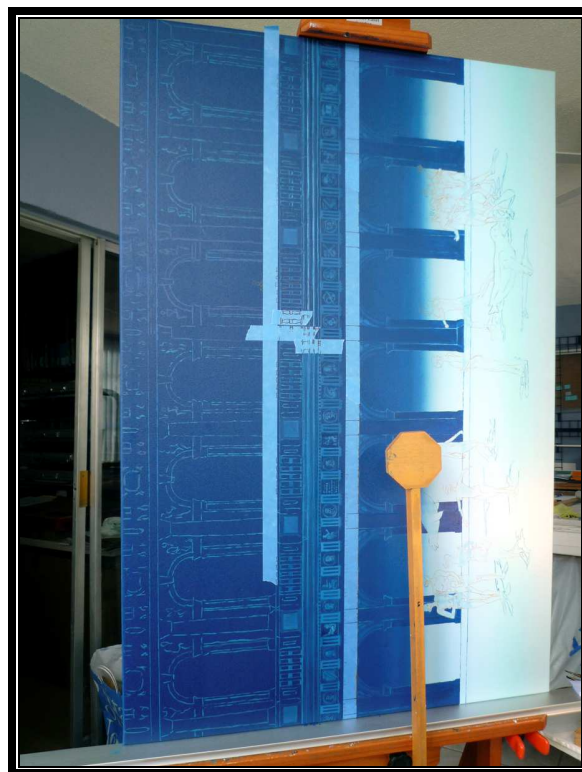
I started on the canvas the different layers of the background beginning of 2008 while I was finishing the final drawings in July 2008. Then I reported the drawing on the dry background and worked on it, depending of the drying of the traditional oil painting process till today.

(pic 5: background and drawing process)



This background is not really a graduation as I'm used to do. One often asks me if I'm doing it with airbrush. Airbrush works with water base paints as acrylic or ink. I use exclusively oil paints. Look at the sky in any landscapes made in the 1700s, they didn't used airbrush...

(pic 6 and pic 7, drawing process)



I'm not used to spend so much time on one painting, but this one was a big piece with a detailed background. Usually it doesn't take more than 18 months to complete a painting (it took exceptionally 10 years for my big "Ring cycle", pic bellow, 45x76 inches, from 1995 to 2005). So, don't ask me to make the showman and to paint in public, there is nothing to show.

(pic 8, *Cycle de l'Anneau*, oil on canvas, 2005, priv. coll. Mulheim, Germany).



Thanks to the chemistry, we can now shorten the drying process (I'm not talking about using the fast drying acrylic paints or airbrush inks, you won't have the same result !) ; so we didn't need to follow Titian's advice (Titian, 1488-1576) to wait one year between 2 coats of paints. Personally I wait 21 days.

You have seen painters in front of beautiful scenery making oil paintings in a afternoon, of course. The process "dans le frais" – the wet process – allows you to make great rough stage as all Impressionnists made. Just rough stage, and they'd better use a camera !

The traditional oil painting process with layers and glazes is the only way to render the depth and to use the light as part of the effect compared to the flat render of the "wet" fast technique or the use of acrylic paints or inks, that make no difference with a photography or a print.

Composition is everything and it takes time to get the right one using the ancestral and effective rule of the Golden Ratio (for example, the girl at the balcony couldn't stand on the next arch), to find the right twist of a ankle, the angle of the legs, the place of the body with the light source I chose. So I can't use photographs from others, not only because it's unethical, but because I didn't create them. You're going to ask me: do you have a great white in your pool asking it to pose as you like ? – Documents, pics or motion pictures help to draw many sketches to find the right position I want and, as Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665), I used also small articulated models.

Putting a lot of meaning in a painting doesn't mean you have to know it. May be that gives more things to see – even not knowing it – and to enjoy when you're looking at.

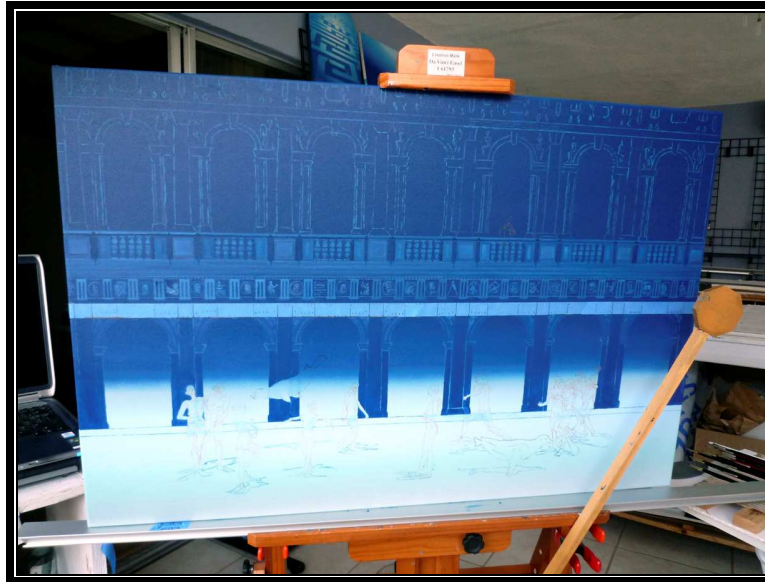
I'm doing painting of imagination and the most important thing is that you're looking at it with yours. I love to hear the story you see in my painting (mostly I didn't think about it) and that, because you have imagination too.

Usually I dont explain what I paint.

On the cartouches, I depicted the Liberal Arts, mostly inventing the allegories of (L to R) Science, Philosophy, Grammar, Dialectic, Rhetoric, Arithmetic, Painting,

Geometry, Astronomy, Music, Architecture, Sculpture, History, Literature, alternately with portraits where, you know me, I slipped some jokes. They are not on the real building !

(pic 9 cartouches done)



Also, I always like to play with numbers (there are 7 arches, 12 characters...).

The distribution of the colors on the garments is a part of the composition too and I adapted the costumes of the *Commedia dell'arte* to my purpose (L to R: a blue Harlequin, Tartaglia, Zani, Harlequin, Pantalon, Harlequin, Matamore, Harlequin, Harlequin, Scapino, Tartaglia, Lelio).

(pic 10, coloring the characters)



Sometime, I like to pay a tribute to my Masters – you know some of my pastiches -, quoting exactly a character or, like here, a position from Venitian painters (the left couple is inspired by Pietro Longhi's (1700-1785) "Charlatan" , next second couple by Gian Domenico Tiepolo's (1727-1804) "Scene carnival Le Menuet" , the right group of four, by G. D. Tiepolo's "Pulcinella in love").

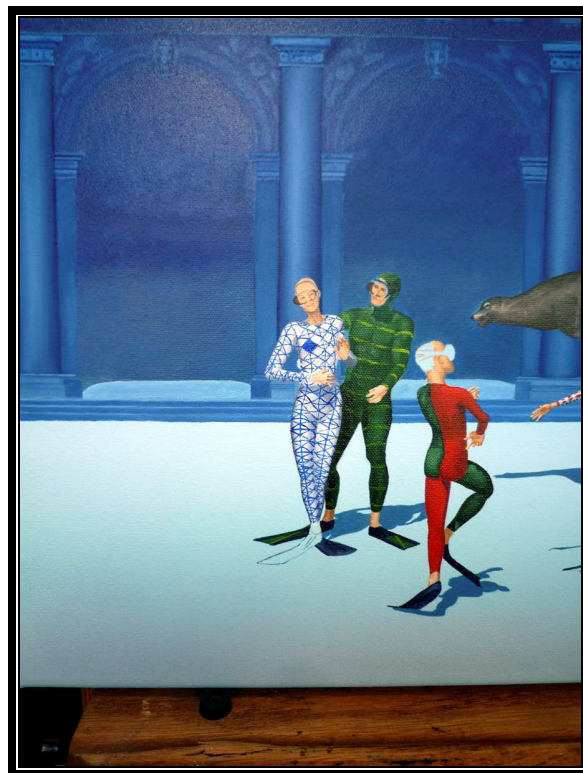
(pic 11, homage to Pietro Longhi and G. D.Tiepolo)



Why seals ?

- Ain't flying sealions the symbol of Venice ? :-)

(pic 12, seal on the right)



Why a running commercial diver ?

- He depicts the bigheaded *Matamore* character (and also, as I like paradox, the notions of light versus heavy).

(pic 13, *Matamore*)



Some quotes are my mottos, they are written on the walls of my studio:

- "Als ich kann", Jan Van Eyck (1380-1441. "As well as I can", from the painter of the best painting of all time "The Mystic Lamb", 1432).
- "Le dessin, c'est la probité de l'art", Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (1780-1867). "Drawings is the probity of art".
- "No masterpiece was ever created by a lazy artist", Salvador Dali (1904-1989), my father in painting.
- "Ce sont les 70 premières années qui sont difficiles pour un peintre", attributed to Paul Cézanne (1839-1906) by my Teacher of drawing in 1973. "The first 70 years are tough for a painter".
- "L'important, ce sont les dessous", me. "Most important is what's under the painting", French people will understand the Rabelaisian double meaning.
- "Composition is everything", me again, see above.

(pic 14, last day of work, Sept 5, 2009)



Yes, I'm still carrying along the road, thanks to the friendship and support from valuable patrons like you.

As a statement,
Pascal

