

Andrea Petitto

Painter Andrea Petitto of Orleans frequently begins her work with a decision about colors. She says, “I usually use some kind of limited palette, for example, two blues, two greens and an orange, or just black, white, red and yellow. There are probably an infinite number of possibilities but each has its own emotional impact.” Once selected, she usually creates an underpainting, a technique that many of the old master painters such as da Vinci, Rembrandt, and Vermeer would use to create volume, to set the composition of a piece, or to establish tonal qualities. Petitto uses the process to introduce “active strokes, shapes, and lines.” She says, “Usually I let that dry before beginning a painting on it. I often have several such underpaintings in my studio.”

Much of Petitto's work has been figural, so her next step is often to sketch the people she'll depict on top of the underpainting. This may be an individual figure, a couple, or a group. She often bases her sketches upon photos that she takes around town, at the market, or from a cookout in someone's backyard. “This presents me with a huge problem to solve,” says Petitto, “how to make it all make sense and be compelling. That is the real work of the painting. The underpainting and the way it intersects with the figures, the spaces around things, everything gives me ideas which I follow—usually quite skeptically. The painting begins to take on a life of its own as I create and solve visual problems such as balance, rhythm, line, contrast, texture and so on. The figure, or figures, tend to get developed and partially destroyed several times in this process.”

Petitto is usually about two-thirds of the way through a painting when its meaning really begins to take shape. This is the work's “emotional message.” She explains that, “Sometimes it's an idea I've had vaguely all along, and sometimes it's a surprise to me. In any case, once I get to that point, I find it possible to bring the painting to a conclusion.”

Andrea Petitto's work can be found at Addison Art Gallery in Orleans, or at addisonart.com
This spring, Helen Addison and Petitto created a virtual show of Petitto's work, and the gallery made a donation to the Family Pantry of Cape Cod for every painting sold.



"HOME FROM THE BEACH" • 24" X 24" • OIL

Petitto wasn't always a professional artist, but she comes from a family of artists. Her father was a sculptor and her mother painted, so while other kids were playing with dolls, Andrea was making sculptures or drawing. Throughout college and graduate school, she focused on science, and became a university professor. In 1997, an oil painting course in Canandaigua, NY, brought her back to art. Since then, she says, “I've taken many classes and workshops with a large variety of artists all over the country, and I still do to this day.”

“Drawing and painting the human figure and other things from life is an essential part of my practice,” says Petitto. “I spent years learning to draw and paint the figure from life and it is a skill which I find needs maintaining, and so I regularly attend life drawing sessions with a model. Sometimes those sessions result in paintings too.”



"BETWEEN HEAVEN & EARTH"
14.5" X 11" • OIL & COLD WAX

Petitto paints in oil and in oil with cold wax, which is beeswax mixed with oils to form a thick paste that can be knifed, rolled, scraped, or brushed onto a surface, making the paint thicker and more translucent. “Like many contemporary painters, I let the brush strokes and tool marks create a compelling surface. This creates—for the viewer—a tension between the representation and the medium in which it is presented.”

Among her influences, Andrea Petitto cites Cezanne, Manet, Toulouse-Lautrec, and Hawthorn. She says, “All of these artists work with the tension between representation and the medium used to create that representation while at the same time expressing a moment of emotional revelation. I attempt to include just those aspects of what I am representing—a gesture, a turning away, a barrier, a passage.” California's Bay Area Figurative movement has also contributed to her artistic sensibilities, and she has learned from the “abstracted landscapes and figurative work of Diebenkorn, Nathan Oliveira's figurative painting, and the amazing sketches and sculpted figures of Manuel Neri.” Petitto is also grateful to “the wonderful artists Steve Carpenter and Melinda Cootsona as long time teachers.” - Chris White



"NATURAL LIGHT" • 18" X 24" • OIL

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"KENT'S POINT WALKERS" • 24" X 24" • OIL