

Telling Stories with Paintings

An Interview with Aldo Luongo, Artist



EDITORS' NOTE In 1970, the sale of a series of black-and-white prints brought Beverly Hills-based artist Aldo Luongo (www.aldoluongo.com) worldwide recognition. In 1967, Luongo was hired by Vanguard Studios to design a line of wall decor, including paintings and sculptures. In 1964, Luongo worked as a jewelry designer at the prestigious Marvin Hime Jewelers in Beverly Hills, after his professional soccer career with the New York Cosmos was cut short because of injury. Luongo was named the official artist for the Olympic Committee at the 1988 summer games. He has a commissioned work that is displayed in the Kennedy Museum in Boston, and for two years in a row he was selected to participate in the White House easter egg hunt, which led to his painted eggs now being on display at the world-renowned Smithsonian Museum. Luongo graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Buenos Aires, in 1960.

Are you happy with the awareness of your work in the market today? How do you work to build the recognition?

I'm very happy that I'm able to produce what I produce. That has always been a dream in my life, as has being able to use my work as a medium to communicate with people and for people to accept my work. It is a wonderful feeling to know that people are willing to buy something that I produced and make it part of their lives. When I think that I'm doing what I like to do and making a living off of and supporting my family, I am not only very happy but also very proud.

How do you categorize the type of work that you do?

It's postimpressionist. I have always been partial to the impressionists. I'm a contemporary impressionist. I paint the figures and landscapes of today. I would categorize myself as a storyteller. I tell stories with my paintings, and viewers can identify with the characters that I paint.

When you consider your distribution, are you happy with the galleries with which you work? Can you give a brief overview of how to find your work?

I'm on two Web sites, so that's one way, and I'm involved with Lahaina Galleries in Hawaii. They have several locations, and whenever artists provide any type of work for them, they have to provide it in quantity, because the galleries demand so much. It's sort of like an insurance policy. It's the type of gallery that you don't want to part with. I have other accounts around the United States, as well as in Japan and England. I also have huge accounts with Cunard cruise lines and Princess Cruises. They are also very demanding, because they have something like 40 ships that are running constantly and a captive audience of, on average, 2,500 to 3,000 people. It's incredible. However, I can do only so many originals, and that's where the print collection comes in.

Did you know at a very early age that you were attracted to this type of work and to being an artist? How did you end up in the business?

I had two loves growing up as a child: sports and art. I had two uncles who were artistic, and I always got encouragement. My father wanted me to be a professional, an engineer, a doctor, or a lawyer, but I had no interest in any of that. I was lucky enough to play professional soccer, but soon I realized that dream was going to end with age. When I graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts, I realized art was the only thing that I could fall back on. And I got awfully lucky with my career, because I know many talented individuals who can't knock on the right door or who knock at the right time but whose package is not right. I came to play soccer for a team in Los Angeles, and the president of the club at that time was very well connected to a famous jewelry store, which no longer exists, here in Beverly Hills. The people from the store asked me if I wanted to be their jewelry designer, which is something that I had never even thought to do. But they fell in love with my drawings, and

they said I had to learn how to design jewelry. So they put me in touch with the guy who was in charge of manufacturing, and he taught me. Then I began to design, and I was very successful with that. Eventually I was hired by Vanguard Studios to design wall decor items, and they sent me to Rome. After that, I decided I was going to paint, because I was dying to come out and do it in my own way, for better or for worse. And that's when I came back to Los Angeles. I knocked on the doors of a few galleries, and one took me in. The rest is history.

Has technology had any impact on the way you create, or is your work always going to be handcrafted?

The only way I use technology in my work is with my prints. I used to do lithographs, but I was never satisfied with them because they are very thin. I had to work on a stone, and it was a laborious process. Then came serigraphs. Serigraphs adjusted to my work and added to it, but it's a tremendously long process, because every painting that I put into a lithograph or serigraph would carry anywhere between 60 and 75 different shades, colors, hues, and values. So it was a long process to produce one of those things. The French invented a new process called the Giclée printing process which uses the four primary colors, and it does an exact replica of the artist's work. In essence, it makes you your own publisher, because the pieces are done one at a time, from start to finish. So I can produce the pieces as I need them, and then I finish them by hand on top of that so they are all quite different. This is practically the only technology that I'm using with my work.

Are there other pieces you paint that you won't sell for some reason?

There are, but I decided long ago that if I was going to take this up, if I was going to be seriously involved in this and try to support myself, I would have to part with these pieces. I came to the conclusion that these pieces are my legacy and that they're actually borrowed. If you have one of my pieces, you will leave that piece to somebody else when you pass on. So I don't feel like I'm parting with them. I'm here, my pieces are here, and it always makes me feel so happy that I can be in somebody else's life through my work, even though sometimes we don't get to meet. It is a fantastic feeling. ●

Tango & Cobblestones, a painting by Aldo Luongo