

From Soho Lofts to a Lounge in Rome: ArtRom, the Domestic Intimacy of an Art Gallery in a House by the Cupolone...

Francesca Di Folco (June 21, 2012)



“There is no place like home.” This is the lead with which the californian art dealer, Elizabeth Genovesi, decided to use her apartment as an art gallery. What is the key to her success? Intimacy, friendship, living art. i-Italy met Denise Shaw, New Yorker and performer, who has shorn with us her passion for painting on canvas

A breath of intense Americanism wraps us in a warm Roman evening of early summer, in the district of Prati, northeast of Italy's capital city. In a small private street, Via Fauti 6, in what would seem an ordinary apartment, we are surrounded by international artworks and immersed in the characteristic atmosphere of the New York art scene, while being captured by the spirit of a home gallery similar to the ones in downtown Manhattan, but that is in the heart of the Eternal City.

Elizabeth Genovesi, curator of the current exhibition and founder of [ArtRom](#) [2], welcomes i-Italy in the intimate atmosphere of the home gallery.



Born in California, Elizabeth has been living in Italy for a long time. She arrived in the “Capitale del Belpaese” from New York and, like all tourists in the world, she fell in love with the Italian way of life.

She decided to extend her stay in Italy and ended up moving there for good. For the art dealer, Rome is a unique and indissoluble combination of art and life, ideally interwoven, in which both spheres of influence continuously flow into one another.

Artistic passion, creative intuition and attention to the new trends are perfect ingredients for an elixir of resourcefulness and ingenuity made in the Usa. This alchemy of love for art that transcends the boundaries of belonging is in the spirit of the Roman ‘home’ gallery.

Unique treats hang on the walls of the lounge. On one wall is the ceramic sculptural series “Impossible Teapots”, small masterpieces of craftsmanship created by Yvonne Ekman, on another wall, bright paintings by New York artist Denise Shaw. In the bedroom there are Storyboxes by the Italian artist ITTO.

Elizabeth Genovesi opens the Artist Presentation Space to what she calls “Art Experiences”. We ask her what the purpose of this new dimension of the exhibition is. Simple: to experiment a remedy to the current mode of presentation of contemporary art, by not placing it within museums and commercial galleries where the approach with the public is cold, unfriendly and keeps the viewer from feeling involved.

A home gallery, by nature, recreates an ambient of full contact with the arts: it bypasses the icy isolation of museums, including the noise and the frenzy of the crowd, giving way to a profusion of calm, relaxing domestic warmth and sociability to recover in an atmosphere of genuine involvement with the few guests.

The idea is the one of letting go of preconceived ideas and notions, too long stifling the public’s relationship to contemporary art, in which the referentiality and austerity of the museum environments and standard commercial galleries creates barriers, obstacles and limitations: “either you are a connoisseur or you do not understand.”

Art is not to be understood, but to be lived, felt, experienced, allowing everybody to participate with ease and openness ... Even the entrance of the kitchen is filled with artworks ...

The ‘Art Experience Evenings’ are scheduled within the calendar of every exhibition. Sometimes they are based on silent observation as theorized by [Slow Art](#) [3], a New York movement born in 2009 by Phil Terry, of which ArtRom Gallery is the only representative in Rome. Through this technique, the multi-faceted essence of the art connects to very personal and solitary moments, bringing the viewer back to a more private dimension of art appreciation. The rediscovery of a sense of collectivity happens through the Storytelling events, in which stories inspired by the exhibited works are created and shared spontaneously.

The Artist Talk Series is another important component of each exhibition. The atmosphere is intriguingly suggestive in the early Summer evening event we participate in, during which the New York artist [Denise Shaw](#) [4] has the floor. The lights dim, the right background music fills the air creating a magnetic charm and inviting you to relax. Finally the artist is introduced . . .

Denise shares with the guests stories about her creative process and the life experiences that influenced her personal and professional growth. Beginning as a cartoonist and graphic artist in advertising she then moved quickly to the realization of works on canvas inspired by literature and her many travels.

Shaw, mesmerizing the guests, narrates that in her loft in Soho the enormous canvases are scattered everywhere and therefore ubiquitous in the everyday life of the artist.

Insight for her art involves hanging the paintings in the study while they are still virgin and letting inspiration, creativity, spirit of the moment related to feelings and moods define traits for the wall

hangings. When the image appears, the artist says, she lays the cloth on the floor spreading the colors on them randomly, and only at the end she will add handwriting of Chinese characters.

Her works are often characterized by the presence of antithetic materials like sheets of gold, sand, raffia petals. The combination of delicate materials and heavy minerals suggests an harmonious coexistence of opposites.

The Artist Talk takes off when Shaw says that the work on canvas created for ArtRom Gallery were inspired by four "Koan" on which she meditated.

The term Koan indicates an instrument used in Japanese meditation practice consisting of paradoxical statements or stories used to guide meditation, producing self awareness and revealing the ultimate nature of reality.

i-Italy interviewed Denise Shaw on this subject.

Is Koan Art more about spiritualism and meditation or intuition, insight and no-rationality experiences? Which part is stronger?

I would say I use my intuition, insight and non-linear thinking in my work and life. I have a 25 year old daily yoga practice which helped me develop a holistic approach to life. Yoga can heighten sensual, mental and emotional responses simultaneously. Having said that, I have always been a poor "meditator". I trust the messages that come when I am working in my studio. I embrace most spiritual traditions but do not subscribe to them.

For me the koan, like many traditions, is a teaching parable. It is a story that provokes thoughts and visual images. My travels in Asia exposed me to the ancient stone Buddha statues lounging in the mountains as well as to the small stupas populating the villages. The koan is attractive because Buddhism is a mental, psychological practice that oftentimes enables you to extract your own inner guidance through meditation. As the Cubist artist Georges Braques stated: "Art is a wound turned to light." The koan takes a difficult situation and turns it into something valuable.

In "The Necklace of Songs" your canvas produces sceneries. Denise, do you make reality come out or do you feel an interpreter of the reality that surrounds you?

With "The Necklace of Songs" canvas I would say I used a Western approach, an interpretation of the erotic temple sculptures at Khajuraho located in the Chhatarpur District of Madhya Pradesh in India. The thousand-year old sculptures represent ecstatic dancing figures, making love with both humans and animals, with the intention of connecting with the Divine.

I use a technique called "painting out" where the artist creates the underpainting -- in this case I painted a temple sandstone wall with a poem in calligraphy -- and then proceeds to paint over it and to add images around it. This technique creates memory and highlights what is below the surface.

You have travelled to such diverse cultures as India, China, North Africa, Scandinavia, Europe, The Americas, Antarctica and the Arctic. What is the protagonist of your art? What is the most important element you get inspired by?

When I travel I am aware of design, natural or man-made, that is indigenous to the place, the country, the city.

For instance, I was just visiting Rome, which is timeless and beautiful, and I kept noticing planters on sidewalks made of concrete with copper band designs. I came back to New York and created a painting titled "Goodbye, hello Roma" using some of that motif and also some designs from ancient structures made of bricks. It is thrilling to experience the ancient Roman architecture, still thriving and present. It is powerful.

In "The Necklace of Songs" your art has the power to create dreams. You are living and working in New York. Does the strength of reality and the hectic rhythm of the Big Apple conditions stimulate



the fantasy in your art? Is it possible to consider your canvas as a mirror of the American society?

All my artworks are created through my experiential, psychological, emotional and intellectually-curious lens of the Indian culture. I was born in the United States, just like my parents and grandparents, however when people ask me where I am from, I say: "I am not an American, I am a New Yorker." There is a big difference.

My next door neighbors are Israeli and British and the neighbors living below us are from India. My husband was born in Norway. My perspective is global.

New York City is still truly the melting pot of all the world's cultures, ethnicities, and lifestyles. The average American does not have this kind of life nor do they aspire to have it. So I would say that my canvases are not a reflection of the American life.

New York is a kaleidoscopic and eclectic city where artists have the chance to enrich and improve their production thanks to its multiethnic charm. Are there any particular aspects of the New York lifestyle you are inspired by? What do you like best about living in the Big Apple? How does it affect your art?

My life is full of culture. It is a life of literature, fiction and non-fiction, film, theater, society, museums, cultural diversity, travel, international cuisine, it's inside of me and it finds its way into my work. As an artist I also live the life of the psyche.

Life essentially is energy and certainly in New York City there is no lack of that. I love living in a global world, it is the only way to live for me...Here we are, all connected and made up of the same particles, only differentiated by cultural nuances.

You have already exposed your works in Rome in 2009 and one of your canvases is about Pompeii. What are the similarities and the differences between Italian and American modern art?

I believe that in Italy every surface and every wall is a fresco with marks of history and antiquity. I know Italian modern art, particularly Futurism and Dynamism. Having said that, the poetic work in watercolor by contemporary Neapolitan artist [Francesco Clemente](#) [5] has inspired some of my figurative work. Clemente is not afraid of making the personal also political.

Another great inspiration is the American artist [Jasper Johns](#) [6] and the way he addresses surfaces, patterns and memory. My affinity to contemporary art goes beyond Europe, all the way to South Africa. I love the works of [William Kentridge](#) [7] and [Marlene Dumas](#) [8] who dissect and address the horrific issue of apartheid.

I think the role of contemporary or modern art is to encourage this expression, the personal and political, the internal and external global conflicts.

From patterns of color, texture, written language and symbol, human, animal and plant life to wood and paper applications on canvases, with layers of paint, pumice, sand and metal leaf. Your artworks enhance the sensual memory, and they are reminiscent of Italo Calvino's designs. Why did the writer's designs inspire you?

[Italo Calvino](#) [9] paints with words. His perceptions are so particular and exact. These hold the tension between the opposites, both physically and symbolically. In my work I intentionally use contradictory materials, heavy sand and gels juxtaposed with thin gold leaf and thin washes of color. Calvino writes of urban beauty and simultaneously describes the underlying city violence. It is also true about New York City.

The last paragraph in "Invisible Cities" is so relevant to me: "The inferno of the living is not something that will be; if there is one, it is what is already there, the inferno where we live everyday, that we form by being together. There are two ways to escape suffering it. The first is easy for many: accept the inferno and become such a part of it that you can no longer see it. The second is risky and demands constant vigilance and apprehension: seek and learn to recognize who and what, in



the midst of the inferno, are not inferno, then make them endure, give them space."

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Links

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- [2] <http://www.artromgallery.com/>
- [3] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slow_Movement
- [4] <http://www.deniseshawpaintings.com/>
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- [6] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jasper_Johns
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