

Bella Italia

Italy Through the Eyes of an Artist

by PAT FIORELLO



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PAINTINGS AND NARRATIVE BY

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Siena Row II (left), Oil on canvas, 12 × 16 inches



Photo by Pat Fiorello

Why Italy?

“Italy is a feast for the eyes, the stomach and the soul.” –Pat Fiorello

Why do I think Italy is a painter’s paradise? As I traveled to this country to prepare for my first workshop several years ago, I wondered why Italy has beckoned so many artists over the centuries. I began observing the countryside within the context of the visual language of art, for instance, taking note of every shape, size, color, value, line, direction and texture that describes a sense of place. The allure of this fascinating country became more apparent as I evaluated its scenery with the eye of an artist. Here are a few of my observations on certain elements of the Italian landscape that make it such a revered subject in art:

Diagonals

Diagonals often add movement and make paintings more dynamic. Tuscany, for example, is a natural patchwork quilt of diagonals. Rows of mountains and hilltops, vineyards planted on diagonals, and roof lines of the distinctive architecture all provide opportunities for dynamic movement in a composition.



Color Harmony

Since much of the stonework in the buildings came from the earth of the local area, the colors of the buildings naturally harmonize with the palette of the landscape. The warm neutral tones of the stones are a beautiful complement to the native foliage. Nothing is jarring. Everything works in perfect harmony. For those who like vibrant color, much of the Mediterranean climate is perfect for lush and colorful flora and foliage—bougainvillea, lemon trees, palm trees, geraniums—you name it. Italians love their flowers and gardens. Even if the only garden is a container or window box—it is filled with love and color!





Tuscan Vineyard, Oil on canvas, 9 × 12 inches

In the old days, roses were planted as an early warning signal for the vineyards, much like a canary in a coal mine warned of impending trouble. The farmers knew if the roses looked unhealthy, then the grapes were at risk. Today, with modern agricultural technology, there is not as much of a need for this primitive warning system, but many wineries grow roses in the vineyards for the sake of tradition and beauty.



View to the Vineyards, Oil on canvas, 18 x 24 inches

At the beautiful Dievole Winery in the Chianti Region of Tuscany you can look out over the eye-popping gardens to see miles of vineyards with gradations of sinuous, blue-gray mountains as the backdrop.



Beyond the Poppies, Watercolor, 16 x 12 inches



Beyond the Poppies II, Oil on canvas, 16 x 12 inches

Above are two versions of the same scene painted in different mediums: watercolor and oil. No matter what the medium, the poppies are like a soft carpet of red and green hues leading to the villa and mountains in the distance.



Lake Garda View, Oil on canvas, 9 x 12 inches

Romance of the Lakes



Varena View, Watercolor, 8 x 16 inches

I've had the good fortune of visiting and painting four of the major lakes in Italy—Como, Garda, Maggiore and Orta—as well as Venice and the Amalfi Coast. For me, water lends an air of romance.

When I first arrived and stepped out of the train station in Venice, I had the experience of feeling like I was in a grown-up version of Disney World. It was exciting and magical and sparked an immediate sense of wonder and anticipation. With all the boats, gondolas and canals (and without cars) the city felt like one big amusement park ride.

The Italian lakes are spectacular with exquisite villas and charming towns dotting the coastline. The often snow-capped mountains in the distance make for a picture postcard scene. Surely these are some of the most beautiful places on earth. Absolutely enchanting!



Architecture

cities, churches and villas



Pienza Sun, Watercolor, 12 x 16 inches

Cities offer opportunities for wonderful compositions of street scenes with dramatic patterns of light and shadow. The magnificent old churches of Italy are exquisite architectural wonders. I have always been drawn to beautiful buildings and villas that are surrounded by lots of foliage. It feels like they are being enveloped in a blanket of warmth.



Radda Shadows III, Watercolor, 12 x 9 inches



Tuscan Sunlight

Watercolor

16 x 12 inches

This is one of my favorite paintings of Italy. It took me several years to figure out where I had taken the reference photo used for this painting. On a trip back to Tuscany about eight years after I painted it, I traveled to Volpaia near Radda in Chianti. There, I stumbled across the scene again and made the connection! Volpaia is a small town, not visited by as many tourists, but it exudes romance with its weathered stone buildings and streets brimming with flowers—classic Italian charm.

San Tommaso
Watercolor
14 x 11 inches

San Tommaso, formerly a church and convent, is where we stay on our painting expeditions to Lake Garda. It is walking distance to the lakeside town of Gargnano, which I painted in *Garda Lake Front* (page 76). There is a lovely cloistered garden perched above the lake with breathtaking views of the lake from on high. This is the edge of the building, which faces the lake and is surrounded by cascading mounds of bougainvillea.



“The voyage of discovery
is not in seeking new
landscapes but in
having new eyes.”

—Marcel Proust