



The Philosophy of a Creator

BY JORDAN STAGGS | PHOTOGRAPHY BY TROY RUPRECHT



“Picasso once said, ‘Light is everything.’ And that’s true.”

French artist Patrice Brunet nodded as he sipped his drink, squinting in the bright rays of sun that were beginning to peek through on what had thus far been a drizzly morning in Seaside, Florida. He continued, “A painting is different in different times of the day. I try to paint in the morning, but I never know how long it will be, and I never know what the day will be like.”

Monsieur Brunet loves to paint, and that’s all that really matters. He received his first paint set as a gift on his eighth birthday, and he knew from that point on that he was destined to make art his career. Although he took a break to serve in the French military and to work as an antiques dealer, a riverboat guide, and a few other things, Brunet’s love of creation never faded. While he enjoyed his work with antiques, he said that ultimately “It’s a lot more fun to sell something you made with your own hands.” And that’s what he now does every day.

He might work on as many as fifteen paintings at a time, starting new ones as he goes and then returning to put the finishing touches on others. His work can be found in galleries around the world, including An Apartment in Paris—the charming gallery and furniture boutique located in the shops at Ruskin Place in Seaside, Florida.

Just as the length of time he may paint on any given day can fluctuate, Brunet’s subject matter can also vary depending on his mood. “If I want to paint rocks, I paint rocks, or fish, or sunlight, or a cityscape. I try to paint what is in my mind.” Other times, his work might be influenced according to where it will be displayed, or based upon who is buying it. Brunet likes keeping his work versatile, using styles and subjects as diverse as abstract buildings, seascapes, and detailed renditions of Parisian *cathédrales*. When it came to Sylvia Forbes, owner of An Apartment in Paris, he said, “I decided to paint something special for her shop.” This included creating abstract scenes reminiscent of the sidewalks in a small town like Seaside—or even a quaint district of Paris—and nautical scenes in calming ocean and sunset pastel hues. Calling forth the Impressionist movement, his works can transport the viewer to a dream world, where what you see is not necessarily what is there, but instead is what you want to see.

“Patrice contacted me because he felt like his work would fit in here,” Forbes said. Her store, which lives up to its name, feels more like a friend’s apartment than a gallery, with knickknacks, candles, jewelry, and artwork placed about in strategic disarray. “Everything goes together in the shop even though it’s all different. I select artists based on how I feel; I like to feel good about the work I put in my store.”

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Similar to the way Forbes selects the work she will display in her store, Brunet likes to take everything in during the process of deciding what to paint. While inspiration for his painting style often comes from Impressionism, he is very open to new ideas and ways of putting a new spin on the classics. “I say to everyone that they should visit a museum and try to open the mind. Don’t just stay with ‘I only like landscapes.’ Inspiration comes from everywhere,” he said. “You don’t create the same thing in every place, and even if you already know an artist’s work, you can still be amazed by looking at them again.”

“Art is very personal,” he went on, “especially with abstract. But it doesn’t have to be complicated. Either you like it, or you don’t. It’s a personal taste.”

Brunet began selling his works in the Southeast after moving to Birmingham, Alabama, to live part-time with his family while continuing to run his antiques dealership in Paris. He now spends his time between France and the U.S., traveling to other places in between.

Forbes said she was thrilled when Brunet contacted her about putting his work in her shop. “I think artists are very particular about where they display their work,” she said. “I love that the diversity in Seaside’s art district allows us to bring artists from many different places here, especially with events such as ArtWalk going on year-round.” Visual artists and musicians, both from the area and abroad, share their works during the event, which is held from 5:00 to 8:00 p.m. on the first Friday of each month.

For many artists, Brunet included, the joy of their careers is not about making a profit. Instead, it lies more in creating something they love and sharing their passion with others. Brunet often does pieces for charity auctions, and he enjoyed hosting watercolor classes for the patients at Birmingham Children's Hospital.

"It's fun," Brunet said. "That's what is most important. Everything you do in life, you should have fun. It's a real pleasure when you go somewhere and you see your painting on the wall. It's very touching. And an artist is not just a person who puts paint on canvas. Artists are everywhere." ■

Patrice Brunet's art may be viewed or purchased at An Apartment in Paris, 210 Ruskin Place, Seaside, Florida; (850) 534-0038; www.anapartmentinparis.net. For more information about Patrice Brunet's art, please visit his website at www.patricebrunet.net.



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