





Soulful Connections in Art & Life

INTERVIEW WITH

Lucas Bononi

BY ALICIA PUIG

Lucas Bononi is an accomplished contemporary painter living and working in New York. After graduating from the Academy of Art University in San Francisco with a Bachelor of Arts in fine art, he went on to complete the core program of Grand Central Atelier in New York. Since then, he has gone on to exhibit at leading galleries and museums worldwide, including a recent solo exhibition at Sugarlift (New York). In Bononi's distinct painterly style, called "Form Expressionism," he reflects the sensation of nature through the lens of the modern world. It is through this perspective that he invites us to question the relationship between beauty and chaos, as well as figuration and abstraction. We were thrilled to have the chance to talk with him more about how he discovered his creative voice and the artist rituals that have provided the foundation for his motivation and success.

What is your earliest memory of art? Who or what initially sparked your interest in art?

My earliest memory of art was seeing my dad making architectural blueprints. My parents were artists in that way. Watercolors and architectural drawings from my father and painted furniture from my mother. One of the first things I clasped in my tiny hands as a baby were what felt like an unlimited supply of markers and pastels. At five, they put me in my first art class. One of the very first things I made was a pastel drawing of my mom on the back of a large architectural blueprint.

Talk us through the genesis and development of your signature style of painterly figuration.

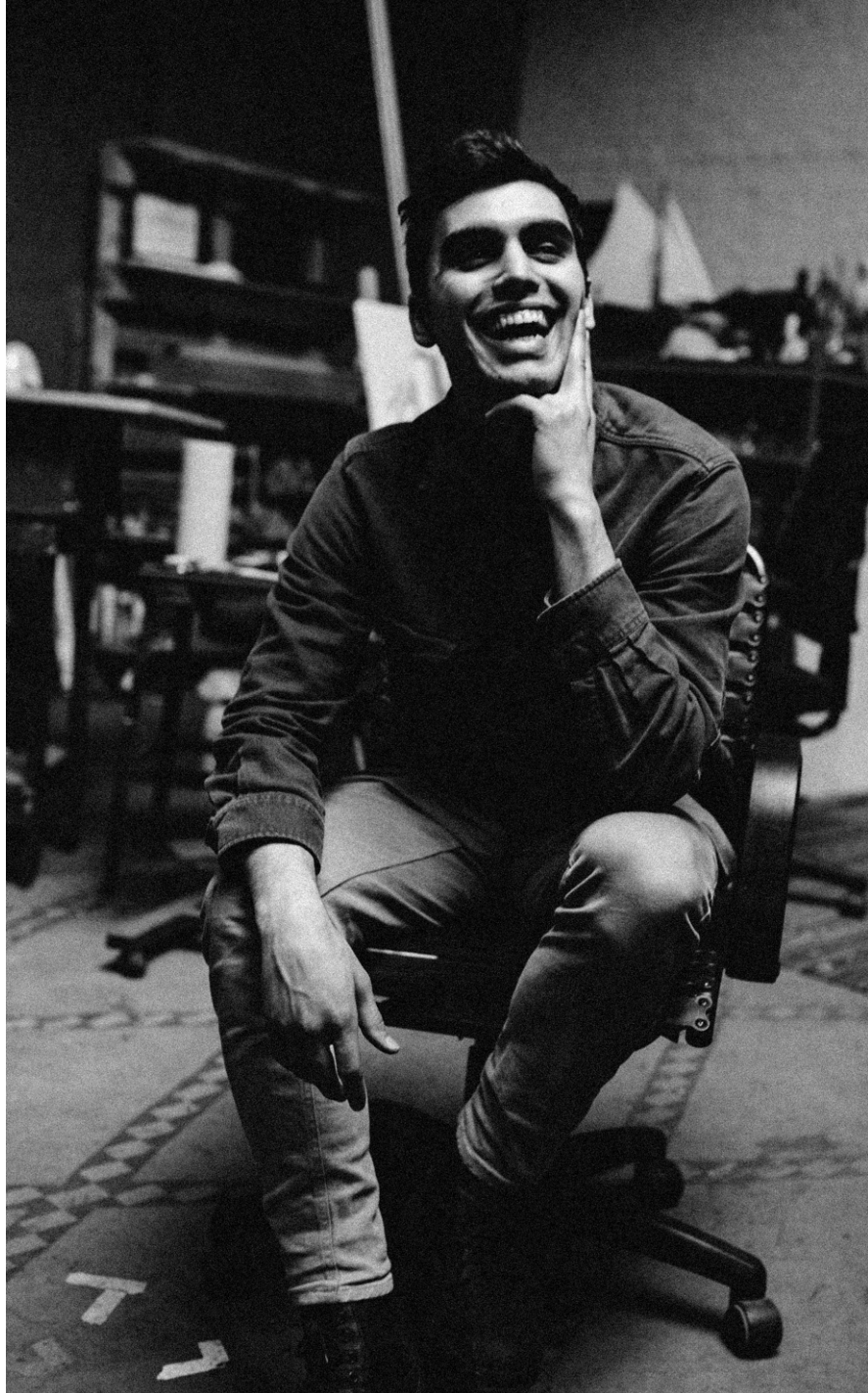
Over the course of the next decade of art classes, there was a choice to be made of whether or not to pursue this dream to become a painter or not. The pain I'd have from abandoning the craft for even just a couple weeks made me feel out of breath, as if living required creation. That was when, after a year of full-time art classes in Los Angeles, where I'm from, it was time to stretch my wings. Moving to Italy was the first thing I did. The vision I had has never been skewed and so I knew that I wanted to make sure that I was to become an expressive artist, even though I was advised by my father to not do so. He wanted me to focus on the foundations of art. Instead, abstraction was what I really longed for.

Inspired by my instructor in Florence, I began to create abstract artworks that involved folding fabric and paper and drawing the forms. Inside the forms, faces began to develop and I then realized the faces. Traveling to dozens of countries with very little savings, I ended up in Buenos Aires, where my parents are from. It was there that I started to produce narrative realism artworks about my travels, especially from Africa.

Displeased with the artwork I was producing, I moved to San Francisco to earn a BFA in painting at Academy of Art University. During those five years, I rode waves of foundations and abstractions. Learning the rules of the trade allowed me to understand that "painting what I see" and "painting what I know" were completely detached. With so many questions unanswered, I moved to New York. It was there that I attended Grand Central Atelier for four years to finally help me to find those answers.

Painting abstract by night and nude academic studies by day, there were two lives I was living. Both made me feel torn apart. I absolutely lost track of the "why." Why do we make art? Graced by the presence of Paula Poons, Larry Poons's wife, I was in good hands with my abstract journey those tiresome nights at Art Students League.

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Abstract expressionism was dear to me, much more than Traditional Realism. Feeling as if though I was a traitor to my peers back at the atelier, it was kept secret. The ambience of academic puritanism is a dreary one full of judgment and competition, and so I had no other choice. It was one of the hardest things in my art life in fact, a sort of slow-burn suffering that Picasso experienced as well when he learned the foundations before becoming the Picasso we know today.

How do you achieve a balance between beauty and chaos? What other themes or dualities do you explore in your work?

This lineage—in other words, the “Picasso Method”—is where one leaves the realistic studies from school and enters their own style. The style that I created for my own way of working is called “Form Expressionism.” It is painting conceptual volume in an academic way mixed with abstract expressionism. The duality between the two often drives me mad, a painting that is too loose feels elementary, while when it’s realistic the viewer has no chance to question the deeper meaning behind it. It is through “Form Expressionism” that I feed my soul, making life exciting and full of love and mystery. This rhythm that my head lives in is a conflict between abstraction and realism. Often, I use abstraction to symbolize chaos of the man-made versus the organic beauty of nature while virtuosity (painting realistically) is the literal surface of the thing being described.

We always love hearing the ways in which artists are also entrepreneurial. What business skills have been the most important for you throughout your career thus far?

Over the course of my art career, I’ve learned that success comes from heartfelt friendships with those who believe that you will do great things for this world with your work. This is something you can’t put a price on. When a gallery hides from you when your work is being sold, it’s time you do business with someone else—talking from experience.

When I first started, I submitted my work to every competition, show, event, and even put work in public venues just to get a pair of eyes on the art pieces. This can get you off the ground; just remember, though, that it is temporary and that you must be willing to take risks. When I quit my job at a furniture store in 2013 almost 10 years ago, I was scared for my life that I would end up on the streets. Calm those fears. You’ll be surprised to find that one year’s salary of that corporate job you’ve always wanted to quit can be made overnight when your work is [in] front of the right people.



It's clear you have a passion for and dedication to your work! While I'm sure there have been times of experimentation and spontaneity, a lot of success comes from consistency. What are some of your rituals as an artist?

Flow state for me is achieved through the sheer willpower to kill the ego. The moment I stop listening to the little voices in my head—"what if I don't sell" or "you call that a brushstroke"—I'm done for. It can take me so much out of the groove of things that I have zero urge to paint. Most don't paint, in fact, when this happens. The best advice I find is to work through it. Make marks that aren't safe. Tread that thin ice, because that is where the best artwork comes from and only then you'll find that a ritual is developed. A sort of addiction toward daily creation is achieved, and through the act of creation you will be inspired and motivated, not the other way around.

What is the magic of art? And of painting specifically?

The magic of art is where the piece, no matter what sort of technical level, brings a warmth to your soul. This deep connection is one that is felt and cannot be put in words. It is what causes viewers to cry in sight of a Rothko. Something inside the layers of paint that transcends the material, a truly visceral encounter with a painting. Art can reveal your inner passions and awaken your core essence, giving you life. Without it we would be living in a culture-less world that lacks purpose.

Congratulations on your most recent solo exhibition "The Forest" at Sugarlift. What's next on the docket for you? What are you working on currently?

After having my solo exhibition, "The Forest," at Sugarlift Gallery (New York, NY), I was so exhausted that I promised myself that I would not paint for weeks. That actually didn't happen at all. In fact, a couple days after opening night I started paintings that will be included in my next solo show, titled "A New Perspective." This body of work has to do with people and things that are out of place. Things that are blown out of proportion in scale, extreme bird-/worm's-eye views and strange arrangements. More details will be revealed on social media and I hope to see you there! ♦

