

# HENRY ASENCIO



▲ Henry Asencio sketches a model at one of his gallery shows.

▶ "Whisper," a limited edition on canvas sized at 15 x 32 inches in an edition of 195



“When I paint, I’m always honest at the easel. If I feel anxiety, joy, frustration—any intensity—then I paint accordingly...”

Henry Asencio grew up dreaming of a career as an artist. When he was 12 years old, his junior high school in Santa Maria, Calif., hosted a career day where students could chat with professionals about their jobs. Asencio remembers being confused. “I was thinking, ‘What’s this? Doesn’t everybody already know what they want to be when they grow up?’”

Asencio admits he didn’t know how he

was actually going to pull it off. “[Saying I wanted to be an artist] was like saying I wanted to own a chocolate factory when the only experience I’ve had with chocolate is tasting it.” However, he couldn’t imagine a life without art.

Asencio grew up in a blue-collar neighborhood and watched his parents work two and sometimes three jobs at a time to get by. Their work ethic inspired Asencio when, after years of working as a self-taught artist with a penchant for photorealism, he got a serendipitous phone call from the Academy of Art College in San Francisco, inviting him to enroll. He gladly accepted. “[At the academy], I learned not only how to render with oil paint, but I was also exposed to museums and galleries and masters and contemporary artists,” Asencio explains.

Driven by a love for art and a desire to learn as much as he could, Asencio relished every day of his three years at the academy.

He also developed his own style during his years as a student. Asencio’s oil paintings blend classical elements of figurative painting with abstract qualities.



▶ "Day Dream," a limited edition on canvas sized at 30 x 30 inches in an edition of 195

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He chooses to paint women because they are symbolic of humanity. "I use a lot of abstract elements to represent something very naturalistic," Asencio says. "From afar, the proportions are there; the edges are there. There's softness from a distance, but upon closer examination, you see [the piece] is made of aggressive, dynamic elements."

Ruth-Ann Thorn, co-owner of Crown Thorn Publishing with her husband, James, discusses the tension in Asencio's work and how it speaks to a search for solace in the midst of turmoil. "The women are symbolic of our need to pull away from destruction, from the chaos of the world we live in," she says.

Thorn discovered Asencio's work in a small gallery in San Luis Obispo, Calif., about six years ago. After the first year Crown Thorn and Asencio collaborated, about 40 galleries represented Asencio's work. Today, his paintings appear in more than 80 galleries worldwide. Asencio is introspective and humble when he considers his meteoric success. "The rush of my first couple of shows was really nice and really amazing for me," he says. "I still get that feeling of joy from seeing strangers show up and buy my work."

Each year, Crown Thorn publishes

five or six different prints of Asencio's work in editions of 225—including 10 printer's proofs and 25 artist's proofs—and the work sells out in six to nine months, Thorn says, adding that the company is sold out of Asencio's original works for two years.

But for Asencio, the thrill isn't in the numbers—it's in being able to live the



dream he crafted as a child and nursed through uncertainty and hardship. "You could take away the notoriety, and I would still be very fulfilled that people respond the way they do," he says, adding that art taught him about himself and the way he views the world. "When I paint, I'm always honest at the easel. If I feel anxiety, joy, frustration—any intensity—then I paint accordingly. If I feel serene, I paint that way. Everyone who buys a piece of my work knows it's genuine."

## AWARDS/ RECOGNITIONS:

Recognized in the 1998 Amsterdam Art Competition as the first artist to be dually awarded with gold and silver medals in two separate divisions: self portraiture in oils and work in the acrylic medium; finalist in *Artist's Magazine's* competition in 1999 for his work in portraiture.

◀ **Far Left:** "Spiritual Journey," a limited edition on canvas sized at 16 x 20 inches in an edition of 195

◀ **Left:** "Eternity," a limited edition on canvas sized at 30 x 40 inches in an edition of 195