

American Journey: My Life in Art

Marco Sassone

Arti Grafiche Press

(362pp)

978-0-935194-15-9

The memoir American Journey details a celebrated painter's reinventions and enduring passions.

Italian American painter Marco Sassone's eloquent memoir *American Journey* traces his personal and career highlights.

Born in Tuscany in 1942, Sassone grew up listening to his relatives' stories and being encouraged in his art. A move to Florence furthered his interest in drawing landscapes, which he pursued at first to receive praise, but then because of the "pleasure of discovery, of fearlessness, of freedom." Here, his fluent childhood impressions fold into adult hindsight, balancing respectful disclosures of family stories with nostalgia for Italy and its people and sites. Sassone makes room to praise and express gratitude for those who nurtured him, including his influential teachers and his father.

Regarding art itself, rich musings arise in the text, with Sassone noting, "Art became my great savior, and youthful passion." He began to paint street scenes on wooden panels and developed his own artistic process. The book is more discursive when it comes to detailing Sassone's personal life in the same period, including his carefree romances in the 1960s and his eventual move to California, where he painted en plein air with the support of a patron family. His 1970s marriage is covered in swift, summary form, while other people in his life are introduced without sufficient setup: a friend is first mentioned as an art historian, though it is later revealed that she also became Sassone's agent; Sassone's love affair with a dancer is recalled in meandering terms.

Still, Sassone is a self-effacing narrator and a lighthearted raconteur. His prose is sharpest when it comes to relaying the pivotal moments that shaped his art: the experience of the 1966 flood in Florence; his move to San Francisco in response to personal upheavals. He discusses other artists, too, including Vincent van Gogh, to contextualize his perspective. There are intriguing insights into his own painting series as well, and into the strikes of fortune that resulted in gallery showings and sales at art festivals. Indeed, there's a sense of romantic inevitability in these memories of going down the artist's path.

Laguna Beach and its surroundings are detailed in vibrant terms. The book's coverage of Sassone's shows on Rodeo Drive and in New York is anecdotal and lively, complemented by photographs of important people and works of art that enhance their particulars. And Sassone's recollections of his brushes with famous people, including Tina Turner and Sophia Loren, are fun additions that flesh out the art scene in his most active periods.

Exploring a painter's unexpected international success and discussing the nature of an artist's vision across time, *American Journey* is a fascinating painter's retrospective.

KAREN RIGBY (September 28, 2022)

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