

For the Love of Brush and Paint

by Bill Scott

A self-described “recovering architect,” **Ed Bronstein** has successfully launched a second career as an artist.

PHILADELPHIA ARTIST ED BRONSTEIN ONLY STARTED PAINTING AT AGE 44 after enjoying a successful career as an architect. Sitting in his studio—which he calls “a big playground”—Bronstein brims with an endearing combination of delight and doubt when speaking of painting and showing his work to visitors. Working from life as well as from photographs, he says, “I love painting places: the light, trucks, things with structure.”

“Ed pursued his decision to be a painter with passion and love,” says artist Christine Lafuente, with whom Bronstein studied for several years. “He is an expressionist who is excited by the visual world and has wonderful mark-making, color-mixing, and drawing abilities. His openness to different ideas and his enthusiasm fuel him. Unlike most painters I know,” she humorously concludes, “Ed’s happy about painting.”

Indirectly, Bronstein’s daughter inspired his return to art. When he was 43, his teenage daughter started painting and drawing as part of her high-school curriculum. Fascinated by her progress, he watched her do anatomical studies and drawings of eyes. Looking back, he observes, he was amazed at how much he learned from watching her improvement. His daughter eventually quit painting, yet, later in the year, Bronstein’s wife presented him with a box of acrylics. After a bout of frustrating untutored experimentation, he realized he needed to go to art school. The following year, he attended a pastel class at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, in Philadelphia, an experience that led to an ongoing 10-year stint as a part-time student at the academy, where he continues to take two or three classes each year.

He started with formal studies in two pastel courses where he drew from models and still lifes in interior spaces. Because of his architectural training, he observes, “I’ve always had an easy time visualizing space. Composition is also something I’m not aware of thinking about.” A course on color, however, proved more challenging. In fact, he enrolled in it twice to be sure he understood its concepts. Later, during a painting class, a teacher proposed that he stop what he was doing and simply paint with patches of color. Following that advice changed his painting, he says, and also convinced him of

Victorian Autumn
2004, oil on panel,
12 x 6. All artwork
this article collection
the artist.



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the importance of continuing to attend classes, because “each one—no matter how challenging—had something valuable and different to teach.”

Through the academy classes he met a number of artists and became familiar with the paintings of several of his instructors, including Jill Rupinski, Al Gury, Stanley Bielen, Alex Kanefsky, and Douglas Martenson. Christine Lafuente also became a significant influence. After admiring an exhibition of her still-life and landscape paintings, Bronstein enrolled in a class she taught at Philadelphia’s Fleisher Art Memorial, where he remained for the next four years.

At home Bronstein used the entire house as an itinerant studio, painting portraits of his family and interiors of the living room or of his children’s bedrooms. In 1997, eight years after he had started painting, he and his wife moved to

a new home in Philadelphia that Bronstein designed. On the first floor he built a 20'-x-30' painting studio and an adjoining smaller work space for occasional architecture projects.

At any one time he will usually have two or three paintings on easels—sometimes they are completed, but usually they are in progress or still under Bronstein’s scrutiny.

The artist tends to be most motivated to paint in the morning, but when working outside, as he frequently will at the New Jersey shore, he can go all day. Cold and rainy weather led to a successful attempt to paint from photographic references. He frequently uses a digital camera to photograph cityscapes and landscapes from which he later paints in the studio. In the beginning he had some difficulty adjusting to painting from photographs. He cites Karen Raugust’s article, “Painting From Photographs,” from the

November 1999 issue of *American Artist*, as a helpful resource that taught him to squint when looking at a photograph. It works best, he says, when "I paint soon after taking the photo—usually the same day in the same light. Otherwise, I tend to become too literal." Bronstein works on paintings ranging from approximately 9" x 12" to 24" x 30".

Although he has worked as large as 36" x 48", he prefers the smaller sizes because he likes to complete a painting in one or two sittings. For about a year he painted on Mylar, which appealed to him because of its smooth surface and the way it allowed him to easily manipulate the paint. He prefers the tight grain of birch and maple plywood panels to canvas. When painting on paper—which he prepares with an amber shellac—he chooses a smooth-surface hot-pressed paper.

When he first painted, Bronstein would hold a palette in

BELOW

**Mott Street,
Chinatown**

2004, oil on panel,
9 x 12.

BOTTOM

First Light

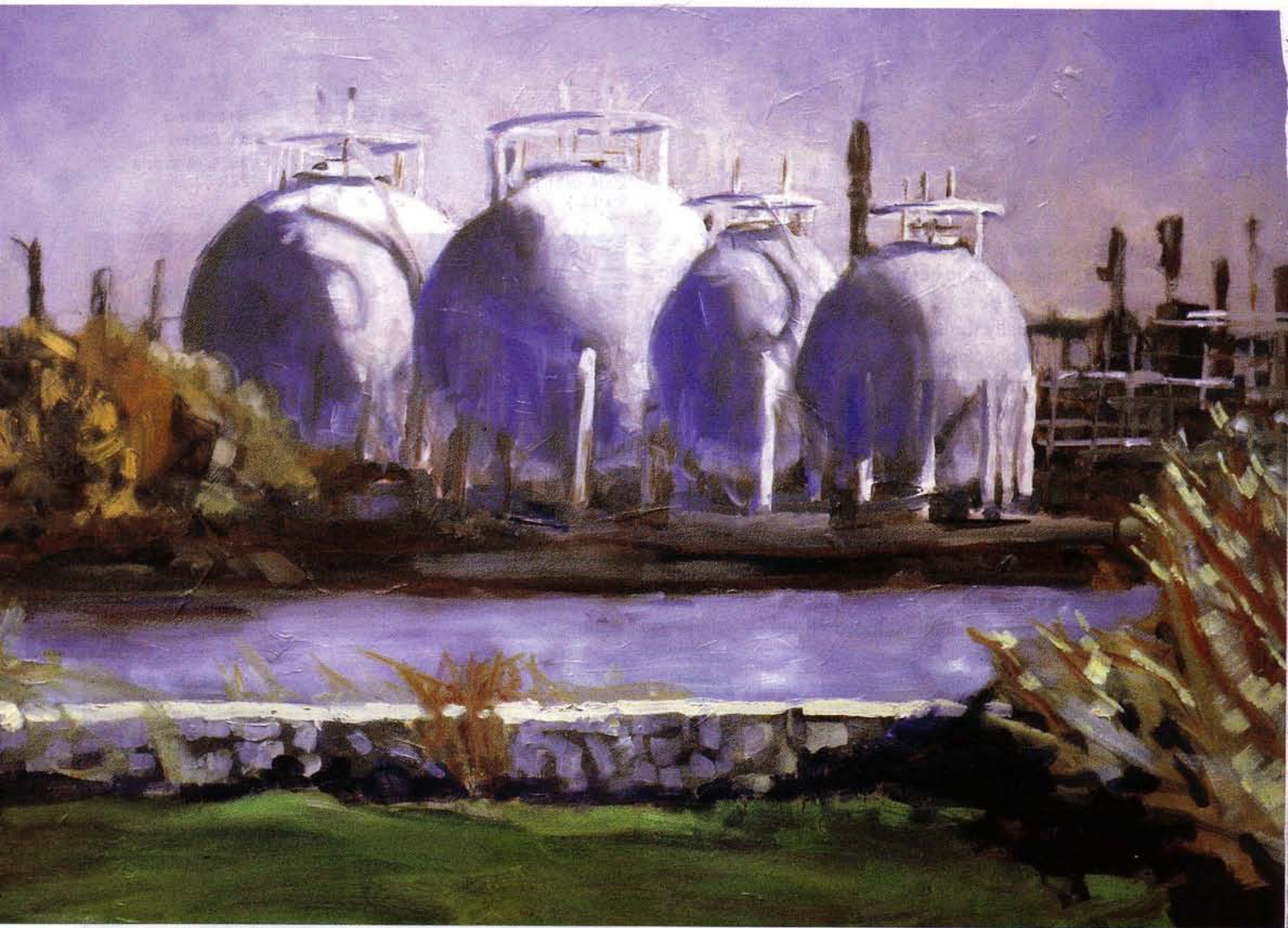
2004, oil on panel,
9 x 12.

OPPOSITE PAGE

No Outlet

2003, oil on paper,
22 x 30.





ABOVE
Tank Farm, Fall
2003, oil, 30 x 40.

RIGHT
**Winter Morning
at Broad and
Washington**
2004, oil on panel,
9 x 12.

OPPOSITE PAGE
**Cranes on the
Delaware**
2004, oil on panel,
16 x 16.



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ABOUT THE ARTIST

Ed Bronstein, of Philadelphia, earned a master's degree in architecture from the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Fine Arts, in Philadelphia. Following his graduation he worked for several architectural firms in Philadelphia, including those of Louis Kahn and Robert Venturi, before going out on his own in 1974. In 1985 he was a founding partner of Bartley Bronstein Long Mirinda Architects. He began painting in 2001, studying at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and the Fleisher Art Memorial, both in Philadelphia. He is represented by The Station Gallery, in Greenville, Delaware; and Craig Flinger Gallery, in Baltimore.

his hand, but he stopped that practice after developing tennis elbow. He uses a 3/4" thick, 14"-x-72" glass shelf balanced on a smaller table on wheels as his palette. For brushes, he prefers sables, but wears through them so quickly that he begins with bristle brushes and switches to the sables as the painting nears completion. The studio, which faces south into a garden enclosed by high walls, receives diffuse light from outside. When painting, Bronstein uses movable incandescent track lighting to illuminate the paintings on his easel or hanging on the wall.

Although he almost always paints and draws while traveling, only recently has he traveled with the expressed intent of painting. His first participation at an artists' colony was in the spring of 2001, when he spent one month at the Cill Rialaig Project, in Ballinskelligs, Ireland; and in January 2005, he painted at the Vermont Studio Center, in Johnson, Vermont. At both he concentrated on landscapes and figures. When he first went to Ireland, he recalls feeling so intimidated that "it took the first week to get my legs." To dispel this fear, en route to Vermont he gave himself permission to not paint for the first week of his two-week residency.

In the past few years he has started a series of portraits of artist friends—often painted in their homes or studios—and continues his ongoing series of portraits chronicling the lives of his wife, son, daughter, aunt, and mother-in-law. "I love the social aspect of painting people," he admits. "I started painting people because I realized I was lonely in the studio—I wanted someone to talk to." When he painted his aunt, for example, he recalls, "I had scotch with her while she posed, and she opened up and told me stories about the family."

Looking back at his circuitous career as a painter and a "recovering architect," he muses, "Painting is more self-indulgent than architecture because you do not need to please anybody—although, I love to please people. I can't imagine ever wanting to retire from painting or traveling somewhere and not painting. At this point in life I do not have the same kind of goals anymore. I am enjoying the challenge of not knowing where my painting is going. My goal is to enjoy it." ■

Bill Scott is an artist who is represented by Hollis Taggart Galleries, in New York City.