

Artist draws animals into inspired landscapes



Numismatic PROFILE

By Carolyn Mullin

While every one of the four D'Angelo siblings spent a lot of time drawing while young, only Claudio pursued the interest long enough to make it into a successful career.

"As far as I remember my drawings never stood out more than anyone else's, but I found the whole process fascinating, and my siblings must not have, because they all eventually dropped it and moved on to other things," recalls the Montreal-based wildlife painter.

Even though he did continue to draw through his high school years, he says it didn't occur to him to pursue fine art as a vocation at the time.

"I knew there were people out there who were artists, but I didn't think anyone made a living at it, so the option of the commercial art field seemed reasonable."

He took a course in illustration and graphic design and went into the advertising world, but he continued spending most of his free time pursuing his art.

"I felt constrained by the amount of time I had for the art, so after about five or six years I took a sabbatical from my work, and put some pieces together to see if I could make a living out of it."

D'Angelo's persistence to follow his dream paid off, and he now has showings across

North America, with galleries on both sides of the border, while his works have been purchased for display in Canada, the United States, and across Europe.

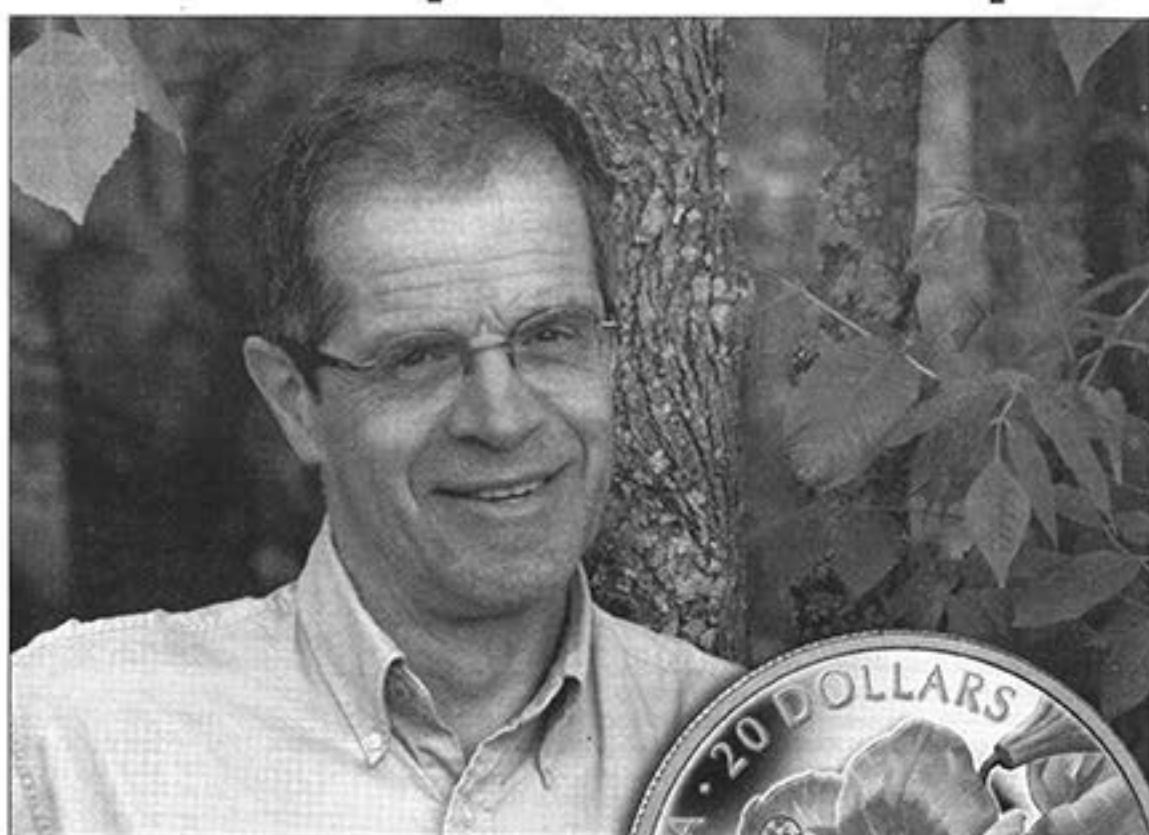
His artwork has also come to the attention of the Royal Canadian Mint, which has kept him on a steady path of designing coins during the past four years. In fact, a search on the Mint's website reveals D'Angelo's designs in seven of the coins of the current collection, including a colourized rhododendron with a Swarovski crystal element; a \$100 for \$100 silver coin in the new "Wildlife in Motion" series; and his most recent, the fifth in the O Canada series, depicting a cottage scene entitled "Canadian Summer Fun."

Most often, D'Angelo's designs depict wildlife or a scene from nature, usually from Eastern Canada. His first commissioned work for the Mint, issued in the mid-1990s, depicts an Arctic fox.

"I paint animals because for as long as I can remember they have both fascinated and stirred something within me," he says. "Some of my happiest memories are of times spent hiking, observing and painting, in all weather conditions, in the severity of northern woodlands, along mountain passes and quite often, simply in the fallow fields near where I live."

Still based in the Montreal area, D'Angelo spends time in the nearby Laurentian Mountains for inspiration, snapping photos and making quick sketches of landscapes. The animals don't always

D'Angelo has contributed this design for the 2013 O Canada entry.



Claudio D'Angelo has been kept busy recently designing coins, including this 2012 colourized rhododendron with embedded Swarovski crystals.



appear, but for him, it doesn't matter.

"I've seen a lot of animals doing interesting things, but that isn't what draws me in completely," he explains. "What triggers the idea for a painting, for me more often than not, is the landscape – an effect, the lighting, some other pattern that just catches my attention, and then I'll remember a scene with the animal, and through drawings I try to draw the two together."

When he is the successful applicant on a coin project, the challenge then becomes designing something within the constraints of the circular format.

"I try to get as much information as I can about what the Mint is trying to communicate. Sometimes it's pretty straightforward and other times it is simply an emotion they are trying to represent."

For the O Canada series, the Mint wanted an idyllic summer scene by the water.

"I usually have an idea right away, so I start going through references and photos to see if there is something that will jive with my idea. I do thumbnail sketches onto a sheet of paper, always in mind to work within that circular format, and then submit a preliminary

to see if I am going down the right avenue.

"Your mind then goes into overdrive because of the ideas that are flitting around in your head – you've got to be able to nail them down on paper rather quickly. I work backwards, in a way, because I know my deadline for the finished drawing, so I need to work in a few days to do preliminary work, and then the finalized work."

For example, the canoe bow in the bottom portion of the summer scene coin was an element he thought of right away, he notes, while other parts of the rest came and went. In the end, a multi-generational scene unfolds on a dock that could be on any lake in any province of the country.

"I could go off in all kinds of directions, but I had quite a bit of training in graphic design, so I'm always trying to see what flow I can create within the space that is given (obviously circular in this case). I'm trying to place the elements; they are not haphazard."

When he has a finished pencil sketch, D'Angelo scans it into the computer to add the numbers and letters, and increases the contrast to aid in the engraving process.

While the traditional coins are often more about an engraver interpreting the hand-drawn lines, he says that the colourized coins don't need that same treatment. What he paints in oils is pretty much exactly what ends up in the colourized portion of the coin.

D'Angelo works primarily in oils, which he says could present a challenge.

"I am very comfortable with oils, but the problem with that is that it is a long time drying and I just don't have the time to wait around for layers to dry. So I have gotten a hold of this medium that allows it to dry reasonably quickly." ♣

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