

## CLAUDIO D'ANGELO:

**WILD-LIFE  
ARTIST OF  
INTERNATIONAL  
RENOWN ...  
DESIGNER/  
PAINTER  
OF COINS  
FOR ROYAL  
CANADIAN MINT**







## Claudio D'Angelo: art-of-the-heart, vivid, authentic, creatively-accu

*“Animals have fascinated me for as long as I can remember. The fact that they live in a world that is unconcerned with the preoccupations of humankind, somehow made them particularly appealing to me. I would spend much time and effort seeking them out in places they inhabited. It was with these continued forays that I started to fully appreciate just how wonderful and inexhaustible this mine of inspiration truly was for the aspiring artist I had become.”*

No matter how quixotic a painter's motivation might appear, something deeper can be implicit in images rendered on canvas in tribute to nature and humankind. Art, meaningful and powerful, reflects appreciation of beauty, history, even life enhancement. And yet, rarely will there be doubts that artists, deep-at-heart, embody the heroic Man of La Mancha in pursuit of the Impossible Dream, forever tilting at windmills, perceived as giants to tame, technology to be corralled, in search of truth and its expression on canvas.

Meet wild-life-artist Claudio D'Angelo, Don Quixote of Laval and beyond, a seasoned-painter still reaching for unreachable goals, heroic visionary with life-long desire to give creatures of the world's woodlands their due, much like Cervantes's beloved knight-errant wanted to give life its due.

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### On Golden Ponds

At 64, the Montreal-born distinguished artist hasn't lost his youthful exuberance, growing up in Laval, when it was sprawling rural/urban mixes of population clusters and untarnished greenery. Here he explored woodlots and fallow-fields, discovering creatures that made those places home. Inspired by these experiences, he spent countless hours filling copious sketchbooks.

A half-century later, he sees his life's work through perceptive lens of an artist who's earned his spurs. By telephone, Covid-19 social-distancing in place, he addresses the dynamics of his art. “I paint images that convey what I noted and felt to be significant to me, on subjects that piqued my interest as I observed them. Each painting more often the result of combining experiences and observations, rather than mere photographic replica; multiple sketches are executed, honing what I want to show and communicate.”

### A road less-travelled

Not your ordinary Canadian-born first-generation offspring of immigrant parents, D'Angelo credits his mother and father with unfailing support towards his passion for wanting to do something special with the God-given talent he intuitively knew he had, from an early age. More importantly, they understood he had to do it, in appreciation of gifts possessed.

After graduating Laval Catholic High in 1973, he studied illustration/graphic design at Dawson College's three-year Commercial-Art program, leading to success as an illustrator. In 1980, unwilling to repress true passion any longer, he chose painting full-time, devoting himself to depicting intimate views of nature, harmoniously integrating landscapes and animals.

“In my teens, to my eternal gratitude, mom and dad, Violante and Venzio, enrolled me in correspondence courses at Famous Artists, in Connecticut. Cofounded by American icon Norman Rockwell, the school was gifted with outstanding American illustrators/instructors who provided generous insights on how to improve. Although it appears anecdotal, the experience was pivotal, introducing me to various art mediums, setting clear paths to my passion, connecting me with artists who helped me grow into full-time painter in my own distinctive way.”

Claudio and wife Linda, Graphic designer by vocation, married 30 years, share their lives with son Gabriel, their great pride and joy, journalist of vocation, accountant by profession. Frequently exploring Canada's wild regions, Maritimes to Yukon, seeking fresh inspiration, adventure-seeking D'Angelo has also visited

American states for similar reasons, and to attend art shows exhibiting his work. In 2012, with Linda and Gabriel, it was Italy, reacquainting with family, visiting artistic and cultural sites.

### Success, ideas, mentors

Oldest brother to Danilo, Renato, and Fabiola, Claudio lived in Montréal's Notre-Dame-de-Grace, until age 6, when family moved to Laval-des-Rapides. Asked if he considers himself successful, he answers with deep-rooted humility.

“Artistic success? Hard to define. Success isn't necessarily equated with popularity. Not easy to discern where one ends, other begins. Occasionally, I'm satisfied with a painting for aesthetic appeal hoped for, while conveying most of what I intended to



**The D'Angelos, vacationing, in Penne, Italy: Claudio, wife Linda, son Gabriel, enjoying the breath-taking view.**

communicate. That's as close as I get to what I perceive to be artistic success. Quest of a lifetime. I like what Charlie Chaplin said: In the end we are all amateurs, nobody lives long enough to be anything else.

We're all susceptible to influences. Artists, no exception, says D'Angelo. “I've had mentors, most significant, David Lank, investment-banker, Professor of Entrepreneurial-management and Leadership-Studies (McGill), retiring some years ago. A leading authority on wildlife art, on which he taught courses at Concordia. In Ottawa, 1981, when approached after a lecture he'd given, he strongly encouraged me to pursue my passion, introducing me to several people, including artists that helped me grow. At Dawson College, Jan Funnekotter, accomplished artist/teacher, noticed my work, offered generous critiques and time towards improvement, though I wasn't in any of his classes.

“I've had numerous other influences over the years, early 20th century artists, most importantly - Swedish animal-painter Bruno Liljefors. There's unparalleled intimacy to his work. There was German artist Carl Rungius, who painted in the Canadian Rockies most of his life. Influential non-wildlife artists include John Singer Sargent (American), Joaquin Sorolla (Spaniard), Anders Zorn (Swede). Today, I include Ontario-based George Mclean, artist and friend, among the finest I know.”

### Inspired, inspiring, rewarding

Is genius 10% inspiration, 90% perspiration? Is this true of D'Angelo? “Ideas come from walks through woods and fields. On these forays I come across birds and animals, observe them, note behaviors, their look, which I record in sketchbooks for future reference. With luck, I might get photographs but I don't

count on those; they rarely capture what I'm after. I take photos of landscapes I find particularly appealing, some which may become settings for animal ideas I'd been contemplating. Sometimes, “reading” snow tracks creates images of what came by, what they were doing, all of which can become kernels of ideas that eventually become paintings.

“Through my work, I strived to recreate the beauty of what I've seen and what I've come to understand of these creatures in their secretive world,” D'Angelo reveals, with thoughts he's master of, given unequivocal dedication to putting on canvas timeless visual insights into the awesome, sometimes terrible beauty of nature.

His work has been widely-exhibited: Society of Animal Artists, National Museum of Wildlife Art, Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum, Bennington Center for the Arts and Algonquin Art Center. In 2012, Yvonne L. Bombardier Museum staged a retrospective of his work covering 30 years. His coin designs of wildlife have been selected dozens of times by The Royal Canadian Mint. His paintings have appeared on conservation stamps, numerous occasions. His work is in collections throughout Europe, Canada, U.S.

Local venues have included Wayne Arnott's Bluenose 'Emporium' – a dream shop for hobby lovers at Pointe-Claire Plaza, where Claudio has spent time with coin collectors who have admired his work.

### Of man and art

We should never underestimate how we affect others. Lack of feedback should not have us discount, nor deny that we do matter. When least expected, we may learn a thing or two about what others think of us, evidenced by three impressions about Claudio D'Angelo, painter and husband, impressions sought without his prior blessing:

“Claudio D'Angelo is a highly-talented wildlife artist. His attention to detail and knowledge of animal anatomy shine through his paintings. Claudio is well-educated in his craft, but still pursues continued knowledge in creating and depicting his subjects on canvas. I'm proud to work with and represent Mr. D'Angelo,” says David Wilkinson, private-art consultant at ArtzLine.com, one of several agencies that D'Angelo cooperates with, in distributing his paintings.

“Does Claudio cook? “Yes indeed! He's an excellent cook. I was the envy of friends. After work I'd always come home to delicious suppers he'd planned and prepared. I can't remember too many cooking failures. When he puts his hand to recipes, they usually turn out (much to the delight of our son Gabriel and I). The first time he made gnocchi from scratch, he nailed it - pillowy potato dumplings, topped with tasty tomato sauce. Does he have a sense of humor? He's a great joker and teaser, always ready with funny quips or funny illustrations for birthday cards. And he does pretty-decent imitations of Woody Allen and Rodney Dangerfield too,” says Claudio's wife, Linda.

“Working with Claudio is a pleasure. Receiving new designs from him is always exciting. He's very talented, able to present subjects in creative and interesting ways that suggest a story to the viewer,” attests Josh Bednar, a product-manager who's worked with Claudio at the Royal Canadian Mint.

As for his impact through art, D'Angelo knows how far it reaches. “I suppose my work affects people in different ways. Some identify with sense of place, exclaiming, ‘I know places like that, been there!’ Others, not much into animals, love nature; scenes I've painted seem to strike chords within them of recognition and affinity. Ideally, I'd want people to see something in my work that might make them reflect a little deeper about another world out there, removed from all human endeavors, but one to which we're all inextricably bound.”

Should art make political statements? “Not a fan of art that's overtly political. It misses the point,” D'Angelo answers. “True power of message is in the undercurrent, true for all arts - painting, literature, theatre, dance, music. I don't paint primarily to shout for protection of endangered places and species, which I believe. But it's my hope to generate concern by having viewers



# Accurate depictions of nature's wonders embedded in one magical paint brush



His Royal Highness, Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, conversing with Claudio D'Angelo at one of his exhibitions.

connect with the pictures.

"Like many artists, my work encapsulates what has stirred me in living this life of mine, and somehow wanting to tell about it. In the end, I need to do it for myself, whether others get it or not. I was doing it to satisfy that need long before there was slightest hint of possible livelihood."

## Is it ever good enough?

Sadly, too many people, often for reasons beyond their control, bury talent rather than give it wings. D'Angelo affirms the need to develop one's craft. "The most important thing in developing one's career? Do the best possible. Never settle for good enough. I still look up to artists, alive and historical, not to make my work like theirs, but as guiding lights of what I recognize as excellence. It's painful to acknowledge shortcomings, but those instances are springboards to doing it better next time.

"Next most important thing: get my work seen, having it included in noteworthy shows, good art galleries, never missing opportunities to showcase it in good venues. A professional artist has to be (artists don't like this word) entrepreneurial. And no entrepreneur can be a one-trick-pony!"

What's art worth? "A dilemma when I first started, basing prices on what peers were selling their work for, positioning myself vis-à-vis others. As with any product, the market, right/wrong, dictates too-high/too-low. I learned it wasn't bad to underprice work, if it meant more sales. Having your work in collections, in the eyes of many, establishes you as serious artist, making big differences down the road."

Should art depict life as is, beauty and beast? "I don't know that art has responsibilities, per se. What motivates me, as opposed to other artists, can be quite different. Good, bad, ugly, beautiful are judgments attributed to different facets of the world. These attributions, mostly unintended, can find their way into my pictures. I've heard denouncements of "bad" or "ugly" directed at given subjects (not always in paintings) and found myself emphatically disagreeing. I paint what I perceive as beautiful, sometimes disagreeable for some, for example, a fox that's just killed a grouse. Such truths are integral to life. I see beauty in that. Life would be robbed of its meaning without death."

## Coining nature's beauty

D'Angelo is understandably proud of his national and international success, thankful for its rewards: "I've been associated with the Royal Canadian Mint, from late 80s. Acquainted with my

work, they offered opportunities to design coins, obviously liking my drawing/design skills, inviting me to participate in numerous coin-design competitions. To date, I've designed over 50 coins. I'm now working on another coin project. My connection to the Mint has greatly enhanced my career, according it prestige I could never have earned on my own."

What's integral to an artist's passion? "Staying true to what motivated you to do what you do. That said, few of us have enough money to be uncompromising. Sometimes, you have to stray to pay for necessities. This isn't betrayal of integrity. If there's consistency in any artist's body of work, I surmise they've stayed true to their commitment. Painting strictly for markets waters down original objectives. It can, of course, pay off. Downside? You and others won't know if you would've had something better, uniquely your own, to offer. Said Steve Jobs: People don't know what they like until they see it.

"Ideally, art offers signposts towards better ways, revealing new viewpoints on matters that have long preoccupied us. It's not to say that I think artists have solutions to society's ills. They don't, it's just that their take on those problems may be coming from a different place, worth considering. If the artist's creation soothes the soul, it's good enough for me.

"Maturity produces clearer perspectives on what's been accomplished in life, and perhaps suggests how best to use what remains. The profession can breed self-doubt, anxieties that can undermine best efforts. Having experienced enough of those, I feel more-equipped to resist the pernicious effects. Confidence in what I do has grown over the years. I don't seek anyone's approbation, as I once did, to keep painting what I paint."

## Tapping the past

According to D'Angelo, painting isn't a job, it's a calling, offering supreme opportunities to honor and make permanent our time and place in the nature of things, with imperatives to do it well. This, in large part, reflects his belief that motivation can come from many sources. Contemporary painters dabble in styles inspired by past movements, their work depicting landscapes that visually demonstrate influences of age-old genres, characterized by interest in portraying nature.

D'Angelo's paintings, defined by natural scenery, inspired by variable settings, depict mountains, forests, rivers. Artists paint landscapes for various reasons. To reflect beauty, they create images resplendent in light, color, texture. "I use scenes of nature to tell stories, illustrate ideas, conceptualize metaphors,"

D'Angelo sums up.

Animals have always inspired this renowned painter. At wonderfully Mature Age, he continues to celebrate nature vividly, accurately, in real-time, painting with detailed feeling, capturing animal individuality, experimenting with color and scale. Horses, bears, caribou, foxes, rabbits, birds and more. His canvasses speak volumes.

## On wings of beauty

"From my youth," D'Angelo summarizes, "sprang life-long passion for animals and their world. Unconcerned with time, I'd spend entire days exploring fields and woodlands in Laval-des Rapides, before shopping-malls and subdivisions claimed too-many green areas. I became familiar and fascinated with creatures I'd discover on those outings, looking up names, reading about them.

"I started collecting butterflies. Their lustrous colors and patterns appealed to my artistic sensibility, barely nascent then. I lavished time and care preparing and displaying these butterflies, exotic-ally-named red-admiral, tiger-swallowtail, morning-cloak. With time, the pleasure derived from my "trophy" paled next to what I experienced spotting these same butterflies freely-flying in natural surroundings. Something subtle but essential was lost. I quickly understood. What I wanted to hold wasn't the creature, but rather the beauty of its glorious colors and patterns when alive and free, that thing which gave it vitality. I realized that art could allow me to come closer to "holding" this ephemeral intangible beauty. Net put away for good, I channeled into drawing and painting.

"Since those idyllic childhood days, my then singular fascination with butterflies has widened. Today I focus on birds and mammals that inhabit wild and rural spaces, striving to convey essence and vitality. To my enduring pleasure with nature, I still find myself joyfully-transfixed at mere sighting of a morning-cloak butterfly, rich hues of its wings reflecting in the sunshine."

## The best is yet to come

Other dimensions to Claudio D'Angelo's life-long mission to bring art to people and people to art? Here are insights that may please, surprise, illuminate:

**Greatest human injustice?** Despoiling Earth for future generations. **Most-admired living person?** Jane Goodall. **Favorite teacher?** Two, among few, in my life as student, John Fasciano, Allan Patenaude. **Regrets?** Ignoring people who truly cared about me. **Happiest when/where?** Surrounded by wild secluded spaces. **Talent wished for?** Piano. **Thing you would change about yourself?** Too hesitant and cautious. It can stifle. **Favorite writer?** Three I've enjoyed recently: Dostoyevsky, Anthony Doerr, Barry Lopez. **Real-life hero?** Martin Luther King Jr, courage, fortitude, unwavering belief in what's right in facing adversity. **Personal motto?** Do the right thing. **Motto for everyone?** Do the right thing. **Favorite television show?** The Simpsons, The Larry Sanders Show, Barney Miller, Taxi. **Long uneventful life, short exciting one?** Short exciting one, life being what it is, the long uneventful one will likely still feel short. **Friend you regret losing touch with?** Cousin from Italy. She passed away suddenly a few years later. **Money's no object, first country to visit?** Probably Italy. **Enjoyable low-paying vocation or boring well-paying job?** Already made that choice. **Hardest thing ever done?** Bringing our very-ill dog to be euthanized. Broke my heart. **Easiest thing ever done?** Asking Linda to marry me. **Favorite season?** Fall, the weather, animals in their prime. **Time for another woman Prime Minister?** Canada should have had more than one by now, prominent countries have done well by them. **Foreign-aid to dictatorships?** Never good. Dictatorships seem genetically programmed to be self-serving. **Favorite movie?** Cinema Paradiso and The Big Lebowski, different reasons. **Your bottle, half-full, half-empty?** It must have been half-full, someone borrowed it and I haven't gotten it back. **How would you like to die?** It won't be my call, so I'll focus on the other stuff, life! Amen...

**Claudio D'Angelo's inspiring art gallery can be viewed on** [HTTP://claudiodangelo.com](http://claudiodangelo.com) Enjoy!