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For over 40 years and up until recently Carbone was the Creative Director and Artist-in-Residence for a design firm, the Carbone Smolan Agency in New York City. The firm won multiple awards for a diverse, multinational group of clients including several major museums, symphony orchestras and hotels. In 2014 Carbone was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award from the American Institute of Graphic Arts for his design work.

Now that is all behind him and he is fully devoted to his art.

Carbone's love for drawing began in early childhood. "I grew up in a blue collar, Italian-American family in Philadelphia where art was never a dinner conversation," Carbone recalls. "The expectation was for me to go into construction." But Carbone's mother recognized and encouraged her young son's growing fascination with drawing. Fast forward to Carbone as a young adult graduating from The Philadelphia College of Art (now The University of the Arts) in 1973 earning a Bachelor's Degree in Fine Art.

Carbone and his design partner Smolan officially closed their agency in December 2019. In retrospect, he realizes running a business that passed out creative work to other artists was, at first, thrilling. But years later as the thrill waned Carbone not only experienced his own artistic energy surface, but better understood the difference between commercial art and fine art. "Commercial art was something I valued being involved in for decades for our clients and for the business. Fine art is something I've done since childhood."

Carbone's childhood love for drawing never stopped being a major touchstone, one that made for a seamless transition from professional design artist to full-time creative artist. "I realized decades later that drawing is my super power. It has informed much of my personal and professional life."

Carbone lives in Piermont with his wife, Janet Coombs, and is father to three adult children. Although he considers himself a new retiree, his soft spoken, youthful demeanor seems to energize his drive to pursue his art.

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The Many Muses Of Artist Ken Carbone

Story by Abby Luby

Photography by Andrea B. Swenson





iPhone to capture an image of a piece of art then quickly moving on. Not so common is someone standing still studying a painting or sculpture and sketching the likeness in a notebook. That someone could very well be Carbone. "I'm one of the nerdy type of guys you see in a gallery sketching. It slows me down," he says. For the last 25 years, Carbone has filled some 36 journals with not only his drawings, but a vast collection of memorabilia from overseas travels, personal notes and collages, each page stamped with the date. On one page, Carbone has deftly copied a portrait by the German Renaissance artist Albrecht Dürer. "This drawing took me about 25 minutes. I traced the artist's steps and it was like having a conversation with the artist."

Carbone is a prominent voice in the art world not only as an artist but as a teacher and writer. He's teaches at the School of Visual Arts and has lectured at Yale University, Carnegie Mellon, the Rhode Island School of Design, the University of the Arts, Cooper Hewitt, The Denver Art Museum, and the High Museum in Atlanta. He's written about fine art and design for *Fast Company Magazine* and for *Huffington Post*. He co-wrote "The Virtuoso: Face to Face with 40 Extraordinary Talents" in 1999 that pairs text and pictures of celebrities. In 2015, he was invited to speak at "TEDx" about his career in art and design.

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we can learn a lot on what trees have so well figured out."

Carbone's passion for trees surfaced in May 2019 at a month-long Visiting Artist Residency at the American Academy in Rome where he worked on what he calls his homage to trees. The resulting work was "Birth of Rome," a large-scale, imaginary landscape painted in pastel wash on watercolor paper and measures six feet high by fourteen feet wide, his largest painting to date. Lebanon cedars and parasol pines tickle the pale blue sky and float above the more sculptural and weighty cypress trees. And because Carbone was in Italy, the work is infused with Roman culture not only for Rome's native trees, but hidden in the painting is an animal that figures prominently in Roman mythology. A New York preview of the "Birth of Rome" is planned for June in New York City and will be up for several days.

In a far corner of Carbone's studio hangs a lone acoustic guitar. Carbone's straw hat covers the tuning pegs suggesting a living form holding the promise of sound. When not brandishing paint brushes Carbone plays jazz influenced R&B on his guitar. The confluence of his love of music and artistic expression is seen in "Opus: Hearing, Seeing and Composing," a series of small mixed media abstracts on paper using metallic acrylic paint, ink, charcoal and gouache, among other materials. "Opus" uniquely contrasts his figurative work intoning an edgy, fanciful spontaneity where angular shapes are grounded by note-less lines of music manuscript amidst an orbital swirl of organic curves.

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Left to right: Umbrella pines from Park Pamphili, Rome, 2019. Graphite wash; Opening spread for Journal number 36, 2019. Casein on metallic acrylic; Opus Series — Moderato II, 2017. Ink, pastel, and casein on watercolor paper.

Below: Ken's homage to trees: "Birth of Rome," pastel wash on watercolor paper, six feet high by fourteen feet wide.



The Many Muses of Artist Ken Carbone

By Abby Luby

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