

# Living Artfully

## Francesco Agresti, Abstract Artist:

An intellectual approach to aesthetics  
and the creative process



The artist Francesco Agresti at home

VENICE RESIDENT FRANCESCO AGRESTI HAS SPENT A LIFETIME STUDYING THE OLD MASTERS, analyzing colors and techniques, even making representational drawings, but like Picasso, mastering many skills, then breaking all the rules, and producing extraordinary abstract paintings, full of feeling and thought, free form but not formless, still but full of motion, geometric yet tactile.

Agresti was born in the pre-mediaeval town of Itri, Italy on the Via Appia about 20 miles from the Mediterranean, where his family tended olive groves. If you have ever made the trip from Rome to Naples, you passed through this town, dominated by a castle which dates from pre-Roman days. His family relocated to the Bronx, NY when he was a child, where he grew up in an immigrant neighborhood, became a true New Yorker and received his Bachelor and Master of Fine Arts from Lehman College (Hunter), part of the incredible CCNY system. Although he had always been an artist, (as a teenage boy his first art sale was a copy of a Vermeer to a neighbor for \$20.00), he started on an accounting career path, until he discovered art school! His career has included art faculty posi-

tions in colleges in North Carolina and Naples, Italy, and he currently teaches at the Venice Cultural Art Center. Francesco and his wife and business manager Helga share a space overlooking the Gulf at Venice Beach, a home stuffed with paintings, works in progress...lots of works in progress, (and about a dozen odd pairs of beach shoes at the front door).

His background explains in part the dichotomy of his art work, the early somber linear paintings evocative of cityscapes, which evolved quickly into the softer-hued palette, still more urban than pastoral for sure, and which goes beyond the fact that environment dictates color palette. He applies and removes many layers of paint, and gives most of his attention to the surface of his paintings. He applies many glazes, often sands until smooth, applies more glaze and more paint.

We first became acquainted with Francesco at the home of a local art patron, who had discovered his work and began purchasing some of his paintings. His work is owned by many famous artists and their estates and has been shown at museums and galleries from SoHo to Denmark, including the prestigious MoMA P.S.1 in Long Island City, Queens. He is represented locally by the Fray Gallery which opened last September in the Rosemary District. *If you have not been exploring the Rosemary District in Sarasota lately, put it on the top of your to do list!* The current exhibition of his work is demonstrative of the intelligence and patience which imbues the work, no slap-dash just for shock effect work here, but fully engaging controlled chaos. He moves from one thought to another, working and reworking canvas and ideas as well and describes his work as "trying to stay within the mystery of it... to stay open and spontaneous and alive. If you define it, you lose it." The unique element of his work is his refusal to dictate or proscribe what the viewer sees. His work is decidedly visceral. Trust me, you can't help but respond to it.

Lori Fray who owns the Fray Gallery on 5th Street, is an artist who opened the gallery space to not only display her own work, but to offer visionary local artists an outlet for non-representational art in a gallery setting. She stays open every Friday night with wine and nibbles and thought provoking art! FrancescoAgresti@aol.com – Fray@fraygallery.com //

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