

ROBERTO BERNARDI

Sweet treats

The hill town of Todi in the province of Perugia, Italy, was founded by Hercules, according to myth. It is the site of one of Italy's finest 16th-century churches, Santa Maria della Consolazione.

Roberto Bernardi was born in Todi and lives there today. He began painting as a young boy and began work in oils at about the age of 13. "I worked as a painting restorer in Rome at the church of San Francesco a Ripa in 1994," he recalls. "I used to climb up the scaffolding in order to admire and touch Bernini's statue *Beata Ludovica Albertoni*, and every time it was an emotionally

intense experience; it was almost as if that marble masterpiece was alive. This experience pushed me toward this obsession to create paintings that are so real that they seem hyperreal in order to bring back the emotion that I felt all those years ago."

Today, Bernardi is one of the foremost hyperrealist painters, composing arrangements of candy from Dylan's Candy Bar in New York and Perugia candies from the nearby city of Perugia. His latest paintings will be shown at Bernarducci.Meisel.Gallery in New York City from March 3 to April 2.

He sets up his smaller still lifes in the extraordinary Umbrian



1
La Festa del Paese,
oil on canvas, 47½ x 67"

2
Le Caramelle Volanti,
oil on canvas, 28 x 48"

3
Blue Candies, oil on
canvas, 21¼ x 21¼"

4
*L'ippopotamo al
Tramonto*, oil on
canvas, 55 x 62"

Images courtesy the
artist and Bernarducci.
Meisel.Gallery



2



3



4

light coming through his studio windows. Larger works require artificial light to ensure an even exposure when he takes his digital photographs.

Asked how his work differs from that of the early photorealists, he replies, "Undoubtedly photorealism has gone through an evolution since the '70s. The first photorealists were provocative in the way they used their imagery. They methodically copied the photograph in its every detail and sometimes even copied the defects of the photograph as if ironically declaring the death of the image. The approach of the new generation of photorealists is different. For me and my wife, Raphaella Spence, the photograph is not a point of arrival but a starting point. We use the photograph simply as reference material. For us, the painting is not finished if it looks like the photograph, only if it transmits those sensations and emotions

that we had set out to reach at the beginning."

He continues, "My process starts by hand preparing the canvas with Gesso di Bologna. When the canvas has eight coats I then sandpaper the surface smooth and I prime the canvas and start the drawing. It is very important for me to draw accurately the outlines of the subject. I then start painting using traditional oil painting techniques."

Most often, the candies survive the process. "I do eat a lot of them when I am shooting," he explains, "especially marshmallows, which I love. They keep me company while I am trying to shoot the right image. Most of them however stay at my disposal because while I am painting the composition I may need to inspect the models and I wouldn't have liked to have eaten the composition before finishing the painting." ●

