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Creating hyperrealistic portraits

Discover how self-taught artist, Victor Grasso uses his coastal roots as inspiration

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beginner's guide to painting
landscapes in Photoshop







Victor Grasso
victorgrasso.com

Materials Used:
Traditional tools

Victor Grasso is a self taught artist who has carved an impressive career through his signature, photorealistic style.

T R A D I T I O N A L S P O T L I G H T

Creating hyperrealistic paintings

Victor Grasso shows us a sample of his surreal yet realistic portfolio, including portraits adorned with accessories from the ocean using oils on canvas and charcoals ▶

Victor Grasso is an incredible, self-taught artist and painter based in New Jersey. Inspired by his coastal roots, Victor often paints his subjects with accessories harvested from the deep, creating an unbelievable combination of darkness and beauty in his paintings. Enjoy these surreal yet seemingly realistic portraits, as Victor shares his artist journey.

2dartist: Hello! Thanks for talking to 2dartist. First off, could you introduce yourself with a bit about your background and projects?

Victor Grasso: My pleasure, thanks for having me. My name is Victor Grasso. I am an artist based in the southern most point of New Jersey, a Victorian beach town known as Cape May.

From the summer I graduated high school I started my career painting murals with a company based in Atlantic City, NJ. I had always

known I would be a painter, but at eighteen I had no idea what my path was going to be, so getting paid to paint commercial work seemed like a great opportunity at the time.

However, painting for other people was not the career I wanted, so after a couple of years I began showing my work in galleries and I have never looked back.

I love to paint the female form and have always used my coastal roots as inspiration. I have shown annually at SOMA Gallery, located in my hometown, for the last six years, as well as Parlor Gallery in Asbury Park, NJ, for the last two, and I have recently shown in ARCADIA Contemporary in NY.

2da: Could you explain some of the creative process behind planning and making your images? What medium do you prefer to use?

VG: I never really know how to explain my creative process. It's really just getting things out of my head into a visual medium. There are stories I want to tell that are inspired by history, mythology, religion – anything that has influenced me over the years, but explaining my planning process is tough.

I see the work in my head running like silent movies, so my job is to translate that in paint. Once I can solidify my vision I hit the sketchbook and draw. After I have a solid sketch the fun really starts. I have models that could be suited up with crazy wardrobe and makeup or sometimes I do the modeling myself. I light my subjects, pose them; sometimes I'll use model heads or wires to hold stuff up. I will go to great lengths to get details. I approach it all in a cinematic way. My sketches are basically storyboards, then I shoot it (I usually do a detailed charcoal rendering), and then I paint. ►



● **TITLE:** *Bad Juju*
MEDIUM: Oil on board
DIMENSIONS: 14" x 16"
YEAR: 2014

● TITLE: *Siren*
MEDIUM: Oil on linen
DIMENSIONS: 40" x 60"
YEAR: 2013





● **TITLE:** *The Presentation of Leviathan*
MEDIUM: Oil on linen
DIMENSIONS: 40" x 60"
YEAR: 2012

The most important part, however, is the painting. I go about making a painting in a very traditional way. I build my own canvases or prime my own panels, whatever I plan to paint on, and then I just paint. I prefer oil paint mostly because of the richness and life to it, but I do work in watercolor and charcoal from time to time, as well. When I can, I've been squeezing in working from life for both the challenge and the nostalgia.

2da: Cinematic reference and dark twists of humor are often apparent in your work (which I love!), not only in subject, but in your color palette. What is your favorite series to date and what was the inspiration/story behind it?

VG: Thank you. I love film and I think of my paintings as stills from a film. It's like the best part of a movie visually with the whole story in one frame. I dig that, and that's the goal.

I don't know if I have a favorite series. My work is always evolving, specifically the portraiture, but I would say my most cinematic series is *The Nemo Project*. These four pieces, which ended up becoming a collection of self-portraits, reflect inspiration gleaned from Verne's *20,000 Leagues*, and having been born and raised at the beach, the sea is a recurring theme that creeps its way into my work.



● **TITLE:** *Neversink*
MEDIUM: Oil on board
DIMENSIONS: 23" x 24"
YEAR: 2014

“Composition, color, application, and subject are the fundamentals you need to think about when making a painting”

The Nemo idea came late to me and completely out of nowhere, so bodies were needed fast and the one person most available to model was myself, and my wife for the final piece, *The Seduction of the Nuns*. I also found inspiration in some of NC Wyeth's black-and-white paintings for *Treasure Island*, and the films of Ed Wood with their post-war era atmosphere.

So, I put together these elements to tell a story of a Captain: a gnarly seafarer who hunted down a mythic beast, displayed it, sold it off, and finally reveled in his reward by indulging in a fine stout, and seducing a bunch of nuns. With that said, it was a lot of fun, but I'm always proudest of my most recent work though. I'm always trying new approaches, paint application, and technique.

2da: You use really striking hyper-realistic imagery and compositions in your images. Do you have any advice for artists hoping to make more eye-catching work?

VG: I don't know if that is something you can give advice about or teach. I'm always looking for the most dramatic composition I can picture in my head without cluttering an image with unnecessary information. Composition is a huge part of making anything, especially a painting. Composition, color, application, and subject are the fundamentals you need to think about when making a painting.

I'm a big 'less is more' fan and I try to not give away the big picture in my work. There is something very intriguing about leaving something for viewers to discover in their own right. Be truthful with yourself about your vision and stick to what will make your work honest. And honesty resonates.

2da: Finally, what are your big aspirations and inspirations? And what can we expect to see from you in the future?

VG: Well, I feel very fortunate that I'm able to do this everyday, but my biggest aspiration is to continue to get better and grow at my craft. I'm my worst critic, so there is an endless supply of knowledge out there on painting to learn. I'm always inspired by the great masters of old, as well as many contemporary artists. I'd love to sit down and paint with many of them and learn some new tricks.

● **TITLE:** *Neversink*
MEDIUM: Oil on board
DIMENSIONS: 23" x 24"
YEAR: 2014



As far as what's going on with me, I will be showing two new pieces with ARCADIA Contemporary at the LA Art Show in January, as well as exhibiting one new work with ThinkSpace Gallery at the Honolulu Museum for the show POW! WOW! in February. I will also exhibit a few new works at Parlor Gallery this summer as well

as a solo exhibition in my hometown of Cape May, NJ in August at SOMA Gallery.

Thank you very much for taking the time to speak to 2dartist! ●



● TITLE: *The Seduction of the Nuns*
MEDIUM: Oil on board
DIMENSIONS: 40" x 60"
YEAR: 2012

