

# ART *in the* DETAILS



MOSES RAYO

BY TIM EINSTEIN

Moses Rayo has a cat named Dutch. She's a pretty calico whose colorful coat reflects her owner's passion for rendering the bright side of life in sunny pictures. Working with oil on canvas, he creates landscapes that are simultaneously realistic and magical.

The artist paints in his Reston home. His kitchen studio is very neat: there are no brushes, palettes or twisted tubes of paint, no rags or stray globs of dried paint. Things are clean, orderly and balanced, traits that also can be ascribed to his work. An unfinished work, "Crashing Waves," sits on a large easel behind the kitchen table. The blue-green seascape is simple and direct; the detail brings the viewer into the physical excitement of the surf on the rocks. A set of shelves, hanging on the wall near the table, holds several statuettes of the Blessed Virgin and Jesus.

Moses is a deeply religious person whose faith informs his work. Brought up by strict Catholic parents in Lima, Peru, in the 1970s and '80s, Moses studied architecture at nearby Universidad Ricardo Palma. "Early on, I

showed a talent for drawing," he says. "I won a contest in high school with a picture of a jumping horse. It was an important thing for me then, and I still remember it fondly to this day."

But architecture was not Moses' true calling: "My parents encouraged me because, to them, it made sense for me. In those days, drawing was an important part of architecture. Today, a computer software program can be used to do that."

In 1992, Moses brought his talent and high energy level to Washington, where he studied English by day and worked in a hotel at night: "I had to work long, hard hours to pay the bills. I had no time to paint, and you need time to paint. It is hard work to paint well and paint precisely."

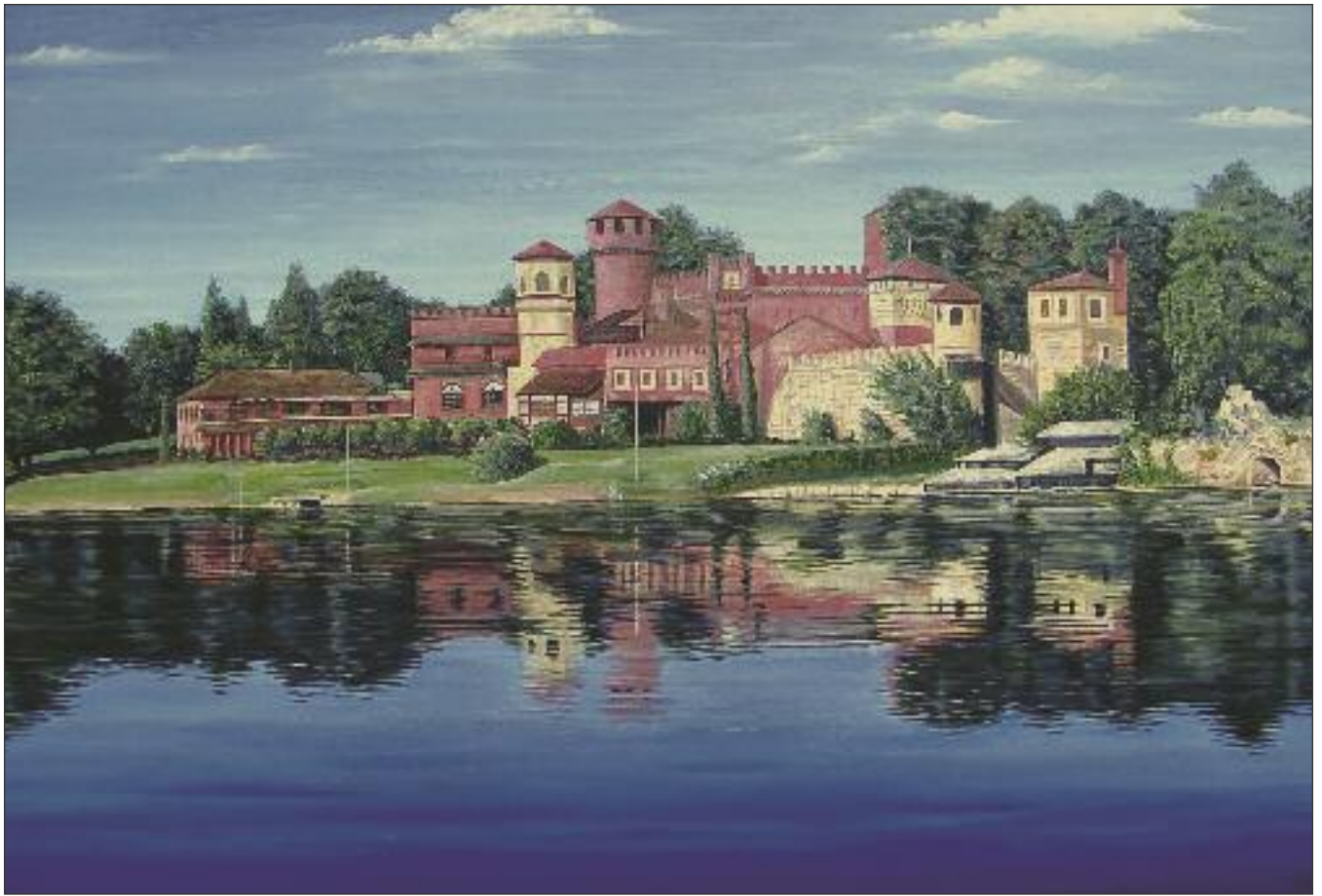
Moses knows hard work pays off; it radiates from his paintings. "Prayers in Sedona" captures the angry, sun-baked glare of the famous red rocks in an orange-red that jumps off the canvas. Cactus and scrub pine punctuate the majestic scene, creating a magical glow.

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FACING PAGE: "SATURATION," ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, 10" X 12"



Precision is important to Moses; he tries to render the things he sees clearly and realistically. “Shenandoah,” a sweeping landscape of the beautiful Virginia countryside, is his largest painting to date (40 by 60 inches) and illustrates his affinity for detailed representation. “You have to be there to be impressed, to feel the place,” he says. The next best thing, no doubt, is standing in front of this painting.

Moses notes that he was deeply moved by the “Alba Madonna,” a Raphael masterpiece on display at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., and created his own reproduction. “Alba” refers to a Spanish family that once owned the original. Tsar Nicholas I obtained it for The State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, Russia. It was later acquired by American industrialist and philanthropist Andrew W. Mellon and given to the National Gallery. The dramatic tension in Moses’ painting is created by its compositional focus: the



Blessed Virgin is seen with the Bible in her left hand and the infant Jesus on her right. John the Baptist holds a cross out, which the Holy Family accepts in a foretelling of their future and of ours.

“Alba Madonna” is an oil on canvas, as are all of Moses’ paintings. “I tried acrylic, but it didn’t work for me,” he says. “It is less flexible than oil because it dries too quickly.”


Generally, the artist works in solitude, is his own boss and is solely responsible for managing his time. This routine creates familiar problems for those who confront white canvas or blank paper. Moses sometimes finds it difficult to set aside several hours to finish a particular image or task. “I am a perfectionist,” he says. “I want to represent what I see. Sometimes it becomes a real drama that goes on for several days, until my wife may say, ‘Okay, take a break. It’s time to take a break.’ But I love it. It’s my life, really.

“My painting really got started when I met this beautiful woman, now



my wife, Sheila, who opened a door for me, because she believed in me. Before I met her, I really didn't believe in myself. She gave me the big push that I needed."

In 2003, the couple decided to take some time off from their busy work lives to travel. They went to Florence where Moses encountered Renaissance glory firsthand and rekindled his own artistic drive. Florentine architecture and the Tuscan countryside became subjects of his painting.

Moses acknowledges that his work has evolved: "Over the years, I have developed my skill so that now there are more lines. Like the new cameras that have more megapixels than the older ones, there is more work, more in my pictures now." His piece, "A Medieval Moment," is rendered in strong, vibrant colors. This, along with other images, can be viewed at [www.mosesgallery.com](http://www.mosesgallery.com). 

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FACING PAGE, TOP: "A MEDIEVAL MOMENT," 36" x 24"; AND "AN AFTERNOON TO REMEMBER," 24" x 36"; THIS PAGE, TOP: "SPECIAL MOMENTS," 30" x 24"; AND "RAPHAEL'S ALBA MADONNA," 24" x 24". ALL ARE OIL ON CANVAS.