

## Art Scuttlebutt.com

## online member of the month FRED CALLERI



rtScuttlebutt.com member Fred Calleri (www.FredCalleri.com) had no idea he was destined to become an oil painter, but he strongly suspects that it was fate: "I think I was only waiting for the window to open for me to

The 45-year-old artist attended the Maryland Institute College make that leap." of Art, graduating in 1993 with a major in graphic design and illustration. After college, the Calleri took a job as a graphic designer for a magazine. Although he was now working a regular 9-to-5 job, he maintained his old habit of painting at night.

In art school, Calleri expressed no interest in painting in oil, preferring to use quick drying acrylic with pen and ink for his illustrations. In 2001, however, he became seriously interested in the medium. That summer, he sold his house and made the decision to transfer to Arizona for a variety of personal and professional reasons. He wanted to be closer to both his son (who lives in California) and the gallery scene in Santa Fe, New Mexico. He knew the city, in terms of art sales, was a "strong and prestigious spot in the country," and he was determined to launch his career as an artist there.

"When I was back East, I would go to Barnes and Noble to buy Art of the West, Southwest Art and American Art Collector," he says. "I could see that a lot of the artists I love were represented (in the West). I figured that was the market I needed to try to tap into."

When he arrived in Santa Fe, Calleri was dismayed to find he felt totally out of place. So he embarked on a spur-of-the-moment road trip to find a more suitable place to live.

"I drove from Albuquerque to Utah to Colorado and back down to Arizona," he remembers. "I did not find one town that I felt was acceptable so I drove west heading toward California."

Calleri eventually ran into Flagstaff, a small city located near the highest point of Arizona. Right away, he knew that he had found the perfect place: "Sure enough, when I got into town I was probably here five minutes when I knew this was it."

In Flagstaff, Calleri moved to a cabin in the woods outside of town where he lived simply and was inspired by the natural beauty of the place. He got a job in town as a graphic designer, but intended to leave it when the time was right. Every day, he painted when he came home at lunch and at night. He stayed focused on his career, diligently practiced his technique and started to see results.

"When I moved here, I was a 37-year-old man with a few thousand dollars in my pocket going, 'Alright, it's all on me," he recalls. "The fear factor was high. It was thrilling, invigorating,

exciting and scary, but it made me work harder than I ever had to work before. My work ethic, which was good anyway, went into overdrive. I was 100 percent committed to surviving, and it made me stronger and harder-working at my craft."

After years of experimentation, it was only a matter of time before he reached a creative breakthrough. "I decided to distort an image one day, a painting by John Singer Sargent," he explains. "I took his portrait, extended the neck and spread the eyes out while trying to copy the master's colors, his brushstrokes and the soft and hard edges. I was using his theory on my style."

The new work caught interest immediately, and friends convinced Calleri to show his paintings to art dealers. In 2007, he got into a gallery in Scottsdale, and by 2008, he was represented by five galleries including Eisenhauer Gallery in Martha's Vineyard, Howard Mandville in Seattle, Washington, Willow Gallery in Scottsdale, Arizona, and Gallery Mar in Park City, Utah.

"By 2008, I was pinching myself, saying, This can't be happening so fast.' It was only one year ago that I left my graphic design job to make art fully every day," he recalls.

While Calleri's distinctive style is quite popular with collectors, he hopes someday to have his work accepted into the prestigious Oil Painters of America Western Regional Exhibition.

"I'm way better as a painter now," he says. "Now I think I can go back and attack more representational themes and be considered because of what I know about paint, about composition, about light and what I see working in paintings that are successful. To be honest, it's something I'd like to challenge myself with. In the meantime, don't get me wrong. It's totally fun to create some wacky lady on the beach with goggles on. You have no idea how many e-mails I get about how my paintings make people feel good. I love to paint. I'm gifted. I'm blessed." AC

ArtScuttlebutt.com is the online community for Art Calendar and ArtCalendar.com. Artists are invited to create a profile and post an online gallery free of charge, participate in the discussion forum and take advantage of the other services at the site.

