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Spencer Feature Interview

FILOMENA PISANO

# Art = Life!

*“For me, there is no greater elixir than making art. I feel a great sense of peace and tranquility even when it’s not working on the canvas.”*

Filomena Pisano

By Joseph Edward Schur

First impressions are truly important. With so many incredible artists from across Canada, working in various media, it's hard to shortlist any one of them deserving of a profile in Spencer Magazine.

However, when I was introduced to Filomena at a charity event organized by a colleague of mine, Mark Sarson, I was immediately impressed with her artistic passion. She had generously donated one of her spectacular paintings to raise money for Operation Prefrontal Cortex, an initiative founded by Julien Christian Lutz (better known as Director X).

**Joseph Edward Schur:** Thank you Filomena for agreeing to this interview. I'm sure that our Spencer readers will enjoy your story! Please, tell us something about your background.

**Filomena Pisano:** Thank you, Joseph! I immigrated to Canada from Italy with my parents when I was three years old. It was not easy to come to a new country, but we settled in Alberta's Crows Nest Pass. We had other family there so it made it somewhat easier. We lived there for several years before moving to Toronto.





**What's the most interesting thing about you that we can share with our readers?**

I think the most interesting thing about me might be that although I am approaching 60, I live my life through a child's filter. I still look at life with childlike wonder. I love to be silly and I laugh at myself a lot.

**Please, tell us about your interests outside of being an artist.**

Well, I love to write poetry. I enjoy photographing people and I love to cook for my family. I enjoy music and live theatre as well as visiting art galleries both local and abroad when I get the opportunity to do so.

**What do you enjoy the most about being an artist?**

Being an artist is one of the most fulfilling acts of self-expression I have ever done next to giving birth to my children. Painting, or rather playing,

in my studio, gives me so much joy. It allows me to express my inner being with freedom. I paint and in it I continue my learning. I love to grow artistically. I study other artists through history and develop technique through my own work as well. Plus, I'm my own boss so I have no one to answer to. Well, possibly my husband who affords me this freedom to develop my art. He's my biggest supporter!

### **Why did you start making art?**

Since I can remember, I've always loved to play with crayons. I love how creating art takes me away from the worldly plane and into a realm of being fully present with paintbrush and canvas. I started creating art as a means to calm my mind from anxiety. For me, there is no greater elixir than making art. I feel a great sense of peace and tranquility even when it's not working on the canvas. The mere act of showing up with a brush in hand and a blank canvas excites me!

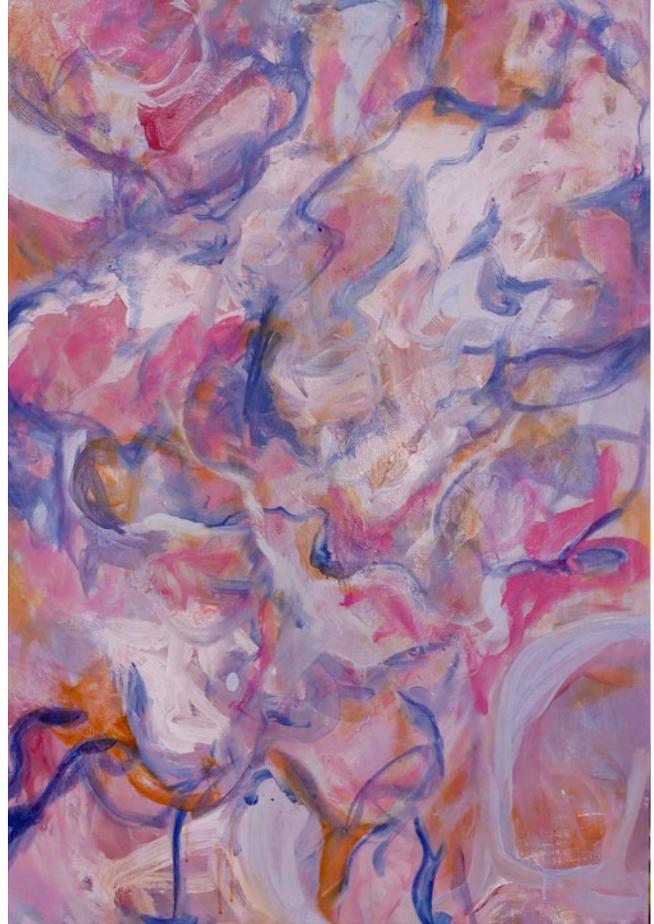
### **Are you glad that you have become a full-time artist?**

I love it! It's a dream come true for me. Every day I wake up excited to go into my studio. Especially now that I have this most amazing place to call my own!

### **What is your favourite experience as an artist?**

It would have to be the time I went to dinner at our local Pizzeria here in Niagara-on-the-Lake. In the middle of winter, after having been in my studio for days, I really needed to have some human contact.

When I went into Pieza Pizza, I expressed to Larissa, one of the owners, how lonely I was feeling. A couple nearby had overheard me and invited me to dine with them. Through our conversation I discovered that they were art collectors! Yes, I know, it's hard to believe! I told them I was an artist and immediately they wanted to see my art. I showed them my pieces on my phone. They stopped scrolling at the third photo and claimed, "I want this one!" I sold a painting to strangers in a pizzeria! They picked up the piece the next morning!



### **What an amazing story! Thinking about that... As an artist, what does success mean to you?**

Success to me is to paint with no agenda in mind and create something that resonates with a future collector or me. It isn't always planned. It develops without ego and time is irrelevant. It's a stream of consciousness that dances into my canvas! It is this process that I enjoy immensely. When I'm able to repeat this process, although never quite the same, I feel a deep sense of accomplishment.

### **What is the hardest part of creating an original painting?**

The drying process! It drives me insane. Especially when I am using oils! I have no patience. I am learning slowly and finding ways to overcome this default of mine. It takes more patience than I possess but it's a process. I'm always working through something, be it the act of painting or developing a part of myself that is challenging.

### **What obstacles do you face in creating and exhibiting your work?**

Covid brought many obstacles. I ran out of paint and canvases and had to wait weeks for new supplies. Exhibiting my art has been easy for me. I've had galleries approach me to show my work. I was given a major solo show at Trish Romance's gallery in Niagara-on-the-Lake, and another solo show at Guelph University. I've had restaurants ask for my work. I've been blessed and so far haven't had to chase anyone down.

**What exactly does your artwork represent to you? During the creative process, do you decide on what message you are trying to convey?**

My artwork represents life and what is occurring in the moment on my journey. The innate beauty of the human face inspires me. I've always loved to draw eyes. In our fast paced society, I like to create work that calls for your attention. That draws you into a moment of stillness. I meditate before I paint, and I never decide anything. I simply move with what's in front of me. What I am feeling, how I may have experienced last night's



sunset, or a conversation I shared with a dear friend. I have no agenda other than being fully present.

**What is the one instrument/tool that you couldn't live without in your studio?**

My brushes! Some women collect shoes or jewellery. I love to collect different types of brushes. Currently I'm in love with a huge massive brush I had made for me. I haven't had the space until this week to use it. I can't wait to set up the room for it. It hangs from the ceiling!

**What is the one piece that you are most proud of?**

I am most proud of my piece "Retorno a Venezia". How it came to be was magical. It was the first piece I created in my then garage studio. I had no idea another face would show up, but it did. I am happy to say that the artisan plates that fell from the shelf on my very first show at Pieza Pizzeria in Niagara-on-the-lake found their way onto my piece two years later. I was so happy to save those hand-painted plates and make the rubble into art! After two years I can now say that it maybe became my first self-portrait.

**Looking back on all of the masters, over the centuries... who do you think has made the greatest impact on you as an artist?**

Oh, there are so many! Frida Kahlo moves me to tears. Michelangelo's Sistine chapel caused me to experience my first bout of Stendhal syndrome. Stendhal's syndrome or Florence syndrome is a psychosomatic condition involving rapid heart-beat, fainting, confusion and even hallucinations, allegedly occurring when individuals become exposed to objects or phenomena of great beauty.

I was so afraid when it happened as we were corralled through the chapel on a very hot day. It was the Carabinieri that recognized my symptoms and brought me into a private seating area till I was able to walk again. I had stopped talking and could barely walk when I looked up to the ceiling and saw all that beauty at once!

**Do any of the current trends in the art world influence you?**

I'm not a trend follower. I paint from how I am feeling. Trends fade away. I want to stick around for a long time.

**What are you working on now?**

I am currently working on organizing my amazing new studio in one of Canada's oldest schools dating back to 1873. I am setting up my space and preparing to create an extensive body of work! It's a very exciting time for me to finally have a studio outside my home. It's been a beautiful journey so far and one that I look forward to continuing.





*We are Spencer, we are the World*