



**"A PHENOMENAL PLACE TO WORK AND CREATE"**

THE IMAGES HERE REPRESENT WORK BY STUDENTS ACROSS ALL ACADEMIC UNITS IN THE COLLEGE OF ARTS AND ARCHITECTURE, PROVIDING JUST A SAMPLE OF THE CREATIVITY AND TALENT THAT IS BEING NURTURED HERE. AS

# Alumni

## PAINTER IS GRATEFUL HE FOUND HIS CALLING

BY AMY MILGRUB MARSHALL

**Y**ou have to get out there and experience life, and find what you really want to do. You have to follow your 'bliss,'" advises **Michael Fratangelo** ('01 B.S. Art Ed.).

Pretty sage advice from someone who graduated from Penn State just five years ago. But Fratangelo is fortunate in that he found his "bliss"—painting—while at Penn State, and then quickly established a fulfilling career in which he combines painting and sharing his artistic passion with young people. By day he's a middle school art teacher, and by night he's an artist working out of his personal studio in suburban Pittsburgh.

He says being an active painter helps his students relate to him and aids him in earning their respect. "I believe that if you're going to teach art, you should be an artist," he explains. "When my students see an article about me, or see my artwork somewhere, it strikes a chord with them."

Fratangelo's work recently gained an international audience when his painting, *Iraq I*, was exhibited in the Florence Biennale, a contemporary art exhibition established to enhance multicultural understanding. A member of the selection committee discovered his eye-catching work on a Web site, "Outsider Art" ([www.outsiderart.info/fratangelo.htm](http://www.outsiderart.info/fratangelo.htm)), and invited him to participate in the exhibition, which took place in Florence, Italy, in December 2005. "The jury said my use of color was unique and that it brought emotion and the feeling of an event to life, through color," Fratangelo notes.

*Iraq I* is part of a seven-painting series featuring Michael's modern expressionistic interpretations of black and white photos of the Iraqi war from *The New York Times*. While his colorful images are powerful, he says they are not politically motivated and are intended to present a documentation of our time. He chose *Iraq I* for the exhibition "because of the interplay of the American soldiers and the Iraqi children. I found it alarming and fascinating that only the Iraqi children were looking directly at the soldiers, whereas the Iraqi adults and teenager diverted their gazes."

Despite his current success, Fratangelo did not intend to study art in college. He started at Penn State as a health policy administration major, but after some soul-searching, switched to art education. In one of his first studio art classes, his eye for color caught the attention of associate professor **John Bowman**, who encouraged him to pursue art as a career. "It was in John Bowman's class that, for the first time, I really felt like I could be a painter. In his class, I just started seeing colors



*Iraq I* (original in color)

in nature, people, objects and social situations that I hadn't noticed before, and that were not at all objectively realistic," Fratangelo explains. "I realized I had a sense of feeling and listening to color in my body. I started to understand I could feel a color and give it a texture and sound in my mind. It was readily apparent that I was processing everything internally in a different way from my peers in the studio classes. Professor Bowman encouraged me, and art became my passion."

Afraid of becoming a "starving artist," Fratangelo chose to major in art education with an emphasis on painting and also earned a minor in art history. "Balancing teaching and my art is not easy, but it's definitely possible," he says. "As a teacher, you grow so much as a person. I think you grow more in this career than in any other."

Fratangelo praises two of his Penn State teachers, **Mary Ann Stankiewicz**, professor of art education, and **Paul Bolin**, former art education faculty member, for serving as both inspirations and mentors. He says they both were generous with their time and took a sincere interest in their students.

As far as his artwork, Fratangelo gets his inspiration from colors and shapes, and his desire to uplift and touch the human soul through his paintings. According to his artist's philosophy statement on his Web site ([www.fratangelo.com](http://www.fratangelo.com)), he strives to "transcend the physical world" in the subjects he paints. "I believe making art to be a public service and a private calling," he explains in his philosophy statement. "When I paint, I feel as if I am a conductor conducting a symphony orchestra in color. Each color and shape I use acts as an instrument producing a sound. The color and shape only works if it hits the right note in the whole of the painting (symphony). Each one of my paintings is an individual symphony."

Fratangelo sold his first painting, his depiction of Pablo Picasso, in the Ellsworth Avenue Arts Festival in Pittsburgh in summer 2002. Now represented by Bella Arte Gallery in Pittsburgh, owned by Rena and Ed Klump, he recently completed his *Nature and God* series.

Fratangelo says he was meant to be an artist. "I'm passionate about it. Being an artist is who I am," he explains. "I feel like I found my path—my unique gift. Every person has a unique gift, but it seems one does not always discover it. I'm lucky, and very fulfilled."



**MICHAEL FRATANGELO**