

# About the Artist

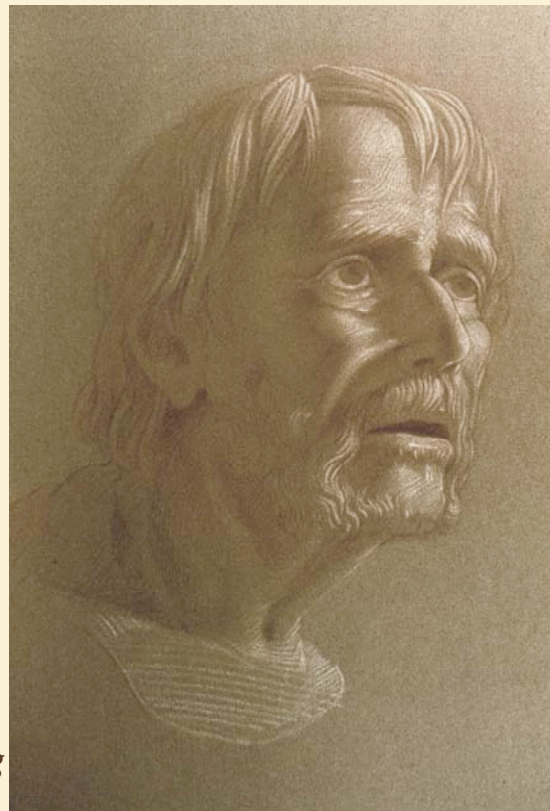
Kurt Wenner attended Rhode Island School of Design and Art Center College of Design before working for NASA as an advanced scientific space illustrator. In 1982, Wenner left NASA for Italy to pursue his love of classical art.

*My interest in Renaissance classicism started with the simple desire to draw well. I was struck by the vast difference between how students and teachers drew in the 20th Century and the way artists drew 500 years ago. It seemed to me that artists of the past had abilities far beyond those of today. My curiosity about this discrepancy took me to Rome in order to seek out and master drawing and painting within the “language” of western classicism. During this time I isolated myself from 20th century art in order to explore the ideals and concepts practiced in earlier centuries. It has since become an ongoing mission to rediscover classical traditions and communicate them to a contemporary audience.*



While based in Rome, Italy Wenner studied the works of the great masters and drew constantly from classical sculpture. The drawings he made brought him in touch with the language of form in Western figurative art and provided him with the neoclassical training necessary for the style he was

pursuing. Through his studies he became particularly interested in the Mannerist period; finding in the monumental scale and sophisticated decoration a direction for his own artistic expression. For several years Wenner traveled extensively in order to experience firsthand most of the major masterpieces and monuments throughout Europe. During these first years abroad he experimented with traditional paint media such as tempera, fresco, and oil paint. In order to finance his travels and studies he became a *madonnaro* and created chalk paintings on the streets of Rome. Within several years he won numerous gold medals at European competitions and become officially recognized as a master of this art form. In 1985 his work was the subject of National Geographic's award-winning documentary *Masterpieces in Chalk*.



*I am continually challenged to rediscover, transform, and share neglected ideas of the past. When creating a large work at a public event I am able to evaluate the reactions of large and diverse audiences. This information has provided me with invaluable lessons in human perception. While lecturing on my work or other art-related topics to professional and amateur artists, as well as art educators, I have had the opportunity to engage a vast number of people in a dialogue that has shown me that while my ideas about art, education, and classics are often markedly different from established views they are nevertheless welcome. I believe that while the patrimony of great masterpieces from the classical tradition belongs to history, the artistic process it proposes is eternal.*



Eventually, Wenner's knowledge of Renaissance classicism provided a foundation for his own art, as well as material for numerous lectures and workshops given throughout the US. A firm believer in arts education, Wenner taught more than a hundred thousand students over a 10-year period and received the Kennedy Center Medallion in recognition of his outstanding contribution to arts education. In addition to teaching, he has lectured at corporate events and conducted seminars and workshops for organizations

ranging from the National Gallery of Art and the Smithsonian Institution to Disney Studios, Warner Bros. Studios, Toyota, and General Motors.

*Because the classical tradition that fascinated me was lost, part of my studies was scholarly. I spent many months looking through libraries and archives for texts written centuries earlier on the artistic subjects that most fascinated me. Artistic geometry was the most fascinating subject. It amazed me to learn how ideas and concepts were transformed through the centuries, sometimes flourishing and sometimes being lost. In one century theories of proportion were hotly debated and in another they were ignored entirely. The study of linear perspective is fantastically creative and inspiring until the invention of photography, when it becomes static and rule-bound.*



In 1984, Wenner invented an art form all his own that has come to be known as anamorphic or 3D pavement art. A form of perspective, known as anamorphism was used by the great European Masters to give the illusion of soaring architecture and floating figures in ceiling frescoes. Inspired by this use of perspective, Wenner invented a new geometry to create compositions that appear to rise from, or fall into the ground. In traditional anamorphic



perspective painted forms appear correct when viewed from one point in space. Wenner's geometry corrects the specific distortion caused by viewing his large images at an oblique angle. This type of geometry has come to be known as *Wenner's hyperbolic perspective*.

Every work of figurative art, even a picture in a frame, employs some illusion. The two major types of illusion are conventional and optical. A framed picture is a conventional illusion. The viewer can choose to see the frame as a window, a starting point from which to visually enter the painted world. This is referred to as "a willing suspension of disbelief." The frame can also be a border, safely separating the real world from the imaginary. The viewer recognizes the work as a painting on a wall long before looking at the subject. Optical illusions blur the distinction between the real and the



imaginary, literally fooling the viewer (*trompe l'oeil*).

*I juxtapose both types of illusion in my work. In photographs of my 3D images the art can appear as “real” as the audience. I use the photograph’s “objective documentation” to question if the contemporary world is really more substantial than the worlds of history and imagination. Although I employ an arsenal of visual tools to create illusion, the classical language of form is the most vital. Classicism is vastly superior to other forms of realism for the creation of illusion as it is based on*

*human perception. Every stroke has the purpose of communicating form and space to the viewer. My perspective technique enables me to bring classicism into the present by creating an optical and geometrical link between a work of art and its contemporary surroundings.*

Wenner’s geometry along with the success of the National Geographic documentary inspired many communities to create their own street painting festivals. Wenner worked with the organizers of the first festivals to prepare the





surface and materials, as well as train artists. Today there are countless street painting events and festivals in the USA and throughout the world that attract scores of professional and amateur artists, along with children and spectators. Over the past twenty years, hundreds of millions of people worldwide have seen a live street painting event, whether in person or broadcast on television or on the Internet.

When Pope John Paul II arrived in Mantua, Italy, Wenner was commissioned to create an original composition for a 15' x 75' street painting based on the Last Judgment. Under Wenner's direction, thirty of Europe's best street painters worked 10 days to create the image. On the last day the Pope signed the mural thus officially sanctioning pavement art as an official form of Sacred Art.



*Ever since their inception, art galleries have modeled themselves after museums by presenting art in a finished form. Although the approach seeks to give importance to the work through this association, more often than not a wall is generated between the public and the artist. In past centuries artists have had more direct contact with their patron and the public. Pavement art events and street painting festivals fill the need for artists and the public to communicate with one another. Many artists find sharing their artistic process a liberating experience and the public delights in having the creative process made accessible to them. Spectators especially enjoy being able to ask the artist direct questions.*



During his years abroad, Wenner executed several large permanent works including altarpieces, a family chapel in Puglia, and an entire ceiling (6,000 square feet) for the church of St. George near lake Como. Nearly all of his paintings have been done on commission with the majority of them created on a very large scale. They can be found in lobbies of corporate high-rises, government buildings, hotels, museums, churches, and private homes.





*My paintings invite rediscovery of many artistic traditions, and I enjoy incorporating mythology, allegory, literature, and theater into the compositions. I find that even if a viewer cannot reference the story they sense that one exists and become engaged, curious to learn more. I particularly like to challenge my audience with a wealth of allusions — historical, stylistic, and perceptual. While some viewers recognize and appreciate the content, others admire the richly embellished surfaces or technical ability. I especially enjoy working on large pieces that “encompass” the viewer. By combining painting with sculpture and architecture, I force them to interact in new ways that often blurs the distinction between them. The traditional appearance of my work is my strongest illusion, as it obscures the bold and original use of perspective I employ.*

*During the Renaissance, the decorative arts were considered the highest form of art with the Sistine Chapel being one of the most famous works of this genre. In addition to paintings, murals, and canvases, the great masters often designed ceramics, tapestries, wood inlay, silverware, and jewelry.*





*Drawings for these works of art exhibit the masters' great enthusiasm and imagination; artists such as Cellini might spend years on a single sculpted piece.*

*Masterful drawings were essential to direct the work of many of the worlds' greatest treasures.*

*Unfortunately the ability to create such drawings, and of artisan apprentices and journeymen to interpret them, has been lost for several generations.*

*Because it is now rare for a contemporary artist to be able to*

*design artwork in this manner all of the arts have undergone a profound change.*

*My years in Italy have given me a special understanding of and appreciation for this important heritage. Although I began by creating coffers, moldings, and architectural details to accompany my paintings and murals, I soon found great enjoyment in designing them for their own sake. Combining painting with sculpture gave me a unique multi-dimensional approach. A very large house filled with expensive but unrelated objects may ultimately*

*have a very impersonal feel to it. Likewise, large unadorned spaces can also feel this way. Unfortunately, strong architectural statements, expensive materials, and craftsmanship cannot entirely eliminate this effect.*

After working many years finishing and decorating homes, it was inevitable that Wenner would be asked to design them. His years in Italy imbued in him a special understanding of and appreciation for architecture, as well as the important heritage of architectural ornamentation. His profound knowledge of historical geometric techniques and proportional theory allow him to combine whimsical and eclectic projects with rigorous organization. He employs symmetrical and functional floor plans, which are tailored to accommodate coffers and vaults. Wenner's



vast experience with materials and techniques give him complete flexibility of design. By designing and executing all the details including columns, capitals, moldings and facings he achieves a full range of artistic expression,



Wenner insures a harmonious composition of decorative elements to enhance and blend with his architecture. By employing modern technologies and materials such as cast stone and resin, he can create a variety of faux surfaces that appear as mosaic, quarried stonework, and fossilized stone. Details can be delicate and precise, yet appear ancient, weathered, and hand crafted.

*Architecture enables me to combine my different areas of study. When I design a residence I like to think of it as a unified vision. I want it to express the optimism and exuberance that I try to achieve in my painting. The goal of my work has always been to alter and manipulate the environment. I strive to have my work encompass the viewer and therefore enjoy creating spaces where people can live within a work of art. Whether simple and devout, natural and rustic, or audaciously sumptuous, I'm always challenge by bringing large spaces to a human scale.*



*My artistic motivation is to rediscover, transform, and share insights from the past. I have been fortunate to be able to share my work with millions of*

*people and hope that it will inspire artists and the public to delve into the patrimony of European Art so they can find the wealth of ideas that is so often hidden with the passage of time.*

