



# *Call* of the *Wild*

BY JOAN BROWN





*Red Maple—Red Fox*,  
oil, 20 x 28"

In early high school, D'Angelo signed up for a correspondence course from the Famous Artist's School in Westport, Conn. "I was introduced to a wealth of new materials, became acquainted with oil paints and never looked back." Other than this interlude of instruction, D'Angelo is essentially self-taught.

It took several years before he even realized there was a profession that would allow him to spend his life painting, savoring and sharing the wilderness that so captivated his imagination. In his young mind, artists were people who'd lived long ago and painted beautiful pictures that now hung in museums. To satisfy his artistic desires in the only way he then knew was possible, D'Angelo gravitated toward illustration and commercial art, working in an advertising agency.

A few years into his profession, he decided to "give painting a whirl and see what happened." Now aware that it was possible to make a living creating fine art, he decided to branch out from painting just on his time off and he took a year sabbatical from the agency to explore the possibility of creating art full time.

## Doing What Came Naturally

One of the agency's clients, Cast Shipping, had leased a fleet of ships, each named after a species of North American mammal. Cast's gift to each new ship it launched was a painting of the species whose name it bore. Knowing of D'Angelo's penchant for animals and painting, the agency asked him to make a submission. The shipping company was so delighted with the first painting he submitted, that it commissioned D'Angelo to do the entire series, not only securing him financially for a good while but providing him with a portfolio of paintings, as well.

One of these came to the attention of David Lank, the author of many books on wildlife art and now a McGill University professor. Lank selected D'Angelo's blue whale painting for inclusion in the book "From the Wild," calling it "one of the 100 best wildlife paintings of all time." D'Angelo's work has also been chosen to appear on stamps of La Fondation de la Faune du Québec, an organization dedicated to preserving wild spaces.

D'Angelo credits Lank with opening doors for him in the art world and for "being the one who, when he saw my work, really believed I could do something with [my art]. He was quite important in my development." Through Lank, D'Angelo also met George McLean, a Canadian wildlife artist he had long admired and now includes among those to whom he owes a great deal.

D'Angelo's mentors find as much to credit in the artist's own innate abilities. Lank points out how D'Angelo's style has matured and loosened to what the artist himself calls "a melding of impressionism with realism." Although his work is realistic rather than abstract, it's not photographic "down to the nth feather," says Lank. "Paintings that are evocative to

FOR CLAUDIO D'ANGELO, THE WOODS, fields and streams he roamed while growing up in Laval, Canada, just north of Montreal, had all the earmarks of paradise. "There was something about wildlife that just grabbed me," he says. "The only way I could possibly hold on to the exhilaration of seeing creatures in their own environment was through painting and drawing. So I started to do a lot of it."





From top:  
*Ermine and  
Mildweeds*,  
oil, 20 x 16"

*End of the Day*,  
oil, 18 x 30"

the viewer," he says, "create an emotional bonding that factual detail alone can't elicit."

Lank also praises D'Angelo's use of color. "He has a special touch with golden light in spring or early morning. Rather than a straight-from-the-tube-type painter, he grasps the way the eye breaks down colors

and recombines them. In painting a moose, he's likely to use blue, red and purple, which the eye captures and then turns into brown. He understands water to a remarkable degree, in a class with top water painters of our day, such as Ray Harris-Ching and Stanley Meltzoff.

"In his style, D'Angelo captures the essence, not only of the creature but of the environment in which it operates," Lank notes. "He's so comfortable in his drawing ability to show it from any angle that he can paint it in whatever pose is best for the overall composition. D'Angelo captures the permanence and the continuum of nature, rather than the frozen moment." McLean agrees, citing the imaginative ways D'Angelo puts his paintings together and successfully "does things that are not easy to do."

D'Angelo says the intimacy of Swedish artist Bruno Liljefors' work has had a tremendous influence upon his own artistic direction. He also cites Carl Rungius, whom he considers one of the best colorists of all times.

## The Role of Discovery

D'Angelo's primary source of inspiration has been Canada's Laurentian Mountains, an area rich in rivers and lakes, moose, wolves and other wildlife. Over the past year or two, he has produced a series of paintings that stem from trips to the Canadian Rockies, and to Jasper and Banff national parks in Alberta. Since moving to the far west end of the island of Montreal, he has discovered a wealth of artistic inspiration. "There's a delicate beauty here that often escapes people's attention," D'Angelo says. "Very often, it's the simple things right in front of your feet that are the most fascinating." The Ecomuseum, a small, private, open-enclosure zoo near his home, also provides a great source for studying and sketch-







ing the St. Lawrence Valley bird and animal species. "It's really just being outside and seeing things firsthand," he says. "You observe more intensely."

## Walking on the Wild Side

Sketching is D'Angelo's way of recording the ideas that whirl in his head as he's walking, snowshoeing or cross-country skiing. It's usually later, in the studio, that he "develops the whole picture."

Most often, it's the landscape that triggers a painting. "On my walks, I'm always on the lookout for interesting, naturally occurring patterns and designs," D'Angelo explains. "When you see tracks in the snow, for example, they tell a story about what animal made them. Ermine are among my favorites. I don't often see these handsome little creatures, but the tracks they leave are unmistakable. In the case of *Ermine and Milkweeds*, a grouping of milkweeds casting long shadows on a snow-covered surface where the wind had carved its own pattern, caught my attention. An ermine, intently focused on something just outside the picture plane, seemed to complete the design."

Of all his paintings, D'Angelo says, *End of the Day* comes closest to encapsulating some of his most memorable experiences during walks near his home. "Few things have given me more pleasure than the swishing sound of long grass underfoot, the fragrant earthy odors on a warm breeze, the fleeting glimpse of a fox going about his business—all bathed in that glorious light at the end of the day.

"I love animals and natural settings, and can't begin to explain why they are so important to me," D'Angelo says. "But painting them as honestly as I can fulfills that pleasure.

"Joseph Campbell once said, 'You've got to follow your bliss.' I truly believe that. When you go that way, you can't go wrong. That doesn't mean it will be an easy road, but I think that the good and the truth that can be attained make it worthwhile. That is where my compass is headed." Clearly, he's well along the path. **WA**

Arts and travel writer Joan Brown is the author of *Colors of France: A Painting Pilgrimage*, illustrated by watercolor artist Margaret Hall Hoybach, available in the Wildlife Art Bookshop.

Images courtesy of the artist.

From top:  
*Cougar and Ravens*,  
oil, 16 x 30"

*Twilight*,  
oil, 18 x 24"

