



A sneak peek at Maria's gestural and experimental studio process

Local Artist... Maria Benvenuto

Interview by Quyen Hutchinson

Originally from the mountains of Santiago, Chile, Manly resident Maria provides an abstract interpretation for the cover of our April issue.

How long have you lived on the Northern Beaches? Since December 2018 when I arrived in Australia with my husband. Manly is definitely the best place to live in Australia, and we are looking to stay.

What's your favourite beach? Shelly beach. It is the closest to my studio and home and where I get most of my inspiration from.

Where's your favourite place to eat, drink, hang out? The Boat House at Shelly Beach for brunch. When having a drink and hang out I like The Skiff Club.

What's the best thing about the Northern Beaches? The variety of beaches and their beautiful landscapes.

If you had to live anywhere else in the world, where would it be? Somewhere similar to the Northern Beaches!

What inspired the cover art? The view of the ocean from a lookout near my studio in North Head.

What else inspires your art? The ocean, the green vegetation, flowers and cliffs in contrast with the majestic and beautiful city. Also, experimentation in the studio is very important. I like to research different materials, surfaces and mediums. 'Errors' or 'mistakes' in the research process can be used to create a good result in the final painting.

How would you describe your art? Abstract art inspired by the landscape. I like the freedom that comes with creating abstract pieces.

What are your favourite materials to work with? Acrylics and different mediums on paper and linen. It is very important to me that the brushstrokes have different characteristics, such as contrast, transparency and layers.

Has your art or inspiration changed since moving to Australia from Chile? I started painting calmer, more contemplative painting because of the feelings and the daily life I have here. I was used to city life, surrounded by high and steep mountains while here I have the ocean with its waves, cliffs with amazing views to

the city, and green valleys with deep tree foliage.

How did you discover you had a gift for art? Since I was a child, I was surprised by most of the paintings I saw. Every time I had the chance to analyse an art piece, I felt an internal connection with the painting that is hard to explain. It is very unique how colours, shapes and gestures capture my attention. I had special admiration towards the abstract pieces. I always feel comfortable and happy making art.

Did you study art? I studied Visual Arts in Chile.

What else are you currently working on? I am preparing a solo exhibition for the Gallery that represents me in NSW, M. Contemporary Gallery.

How can people buy and support your work? They can buy directly from M. Contemporary Gallery.

Any words of wisdom for aspiring artists? It is important to be persistent and put a lot of effort on what you love to achieve your goals. For me, creating a social media profile and website has become key in connecting me with people interested in my process and work across the globe, with no limits. Experimenting with different materials and techniques is an important part of the creative process. Trust the process since after every stroke there may be a unique and creative result.

What is your favourite thing about what you do? I have fun while I work and feel free to express my feelings on canvas. **Do you have a suitably pretentious quote to share with our readers?** Viva la vida.

Follow Maria on social
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How to: Communicate Better

The Love Scout by Scout Smith-O'Leary

We can all agree that tension, arguments and fights bring unwanted stress to relationships. If they are swept under the rug, over time they can erode our connection to the people we love most. From a cold shoulder to a passive aggressive comment, there are many verbal and non-verbal communications that can really get your back up. Effective communication builds intimacy, trust and happiness, so you can love more and fight less. Here are our top tips for becoming a communication boss.

Make space to talk. It's really important that you and your partner schedule time (once a month should do it) to go over all the aspects of the relationship. From money to health, family, work, travel, projects, kids and sex, you must do your relationship maintenance. If you have an issue, you don't want to bring it up when things are good; who would want to ruin the good times? On the contrary, you don't want to bring it up when things are unsteady because it might put you further

in the hole. Make intentional space so that nothing gets swept under the rug.

Clarify the communication. Nothing is more annoying than when you just want to share how you feel and your partner comes up with a long list of solutions to fix your problems! Before you make assumptions, ask yourself and your partner this question: what is the intention of this communication? Do I want to share my thoughts, feelings or ideas? Do I need to get something off my chest? Am I looking for advice, help or solutions? Know the answer, that way you won't get pissed if they have a different intention.

Check in. No one likes to be constantly dumped on. Instead of thinking purely about yourself, ask your partner if they have the emotional capacity for the conversation. After a stressful

work week, nagging kids and painful in-laws to visit, it's not always the ideal time for a relationship chat. Be strategic and optimize the best possible outcome for you both. Re-schedule your chat if you don't have the energy.

Actively listen. You know that feeling of wanting to pull your hair out because someone isn't really listening to you in a conversation? Well it's not very nice, so make sure you show up. Give eye contact, mental presence, paraphrase, ask questions, clarify and reflect body language. This will make your partner feel valued, appreciated and respected.

Validate. When sharing our thoughts and feelings, most of the time we just want to be validated. This is hugely reassuring and shows empathy. Instead of cutting off, ignoring, judging or changing the subject, try comments like: "It makes sense that you feel..." or "I can see why you think that way" or "I would feel that way too in your situation".

Instead of allowing emotions to dictate communication, it is much more effective to go into them strategically, especially the important ones. None of us went to relationship school, so this is your cheat sheet of communication essentials. If you want the best possible outcome, implement the best procedure.

"I'm so willing to listen to you and be empathetic to your perspective while you're yelling at me" – said no one ever.

Scout is a matchmaker and relationship educator. To learn more about her upcoming dating workshops visit www.schoolofconnectionsydney.com