



Constantin Brancusi once said that, "Architecture is inhabited sculpture," and few painters have explored the interiors of inhabited sculptures more faithfully than **Alexander Sergeeff**, or "Sasha." Trained in the cold light of Russia, currently painting in the warm light of Italy, Sasha paints interiors that frequently lack figures but always powerfully convey the people who gave the room its character.

A MASTERFUL PAINTER OF INHABITED SCULPTURE

When I paint an interior portrait I always begin with a visit to the room or area, interviewing people who live there, and observing their lifestyles and personalities. I then take photographs of the room, various objects that are especially important to the people who live there, and collect as much information on their culture and daily lives as I can.

Next I decide what imprint or character to give the painting: a male character, a female character, or a mixture of the two. Any interior always has its own character established by the dominant person who lives there. The dominant character can be depicted from the objects and the colors I put on the canvas and from the types of objects, and their quantity, location, and deployment.





British Interior, oil on canvas, 60 x 80cm (23½ x 31½")
Interior of a British villa during the Victorian Era (1837-1901).



The Garden of Orange Fruits, oil on canvas, 50 x 40cm (19³/₄ x 16")
A garden in a Roman house between reality and fantasy.

"I have an instinctive fear of the use of white in the initial phase of a new work."

***My Friends*, oil on canvas, 100 x 180cm (39 x 72")** ▶

Everyone in this picture is a friend of mine, and they're in a popular old-style restaurant in Rome's Via Margutta, "the street of the artists."

Deciding on a scene's gender

How, you might ask, do objects indicate a male or female character? In general, an interior that has objects in good order and neat has a female character because women deploy objects in a more orderly fashion than men do. For example, a woman will pay more attention to the flowers in a vase, whereas a man will pay more attention to the vase and its shape and color. Another example is window curtains: while a man usually does not give importance to curtains in a room, and many times will have no curtains at all in his rooms, women tend to give great care to curtains. In addition, women will set pillows on sofas, while men usually do not, so a sofa full of pillows gives a feminine character to a painting while one with few or no pillows gives a male character.

In the same way, the kinds of objects in an interior frequently will convey the social status of the inhabitant. A culturally rich person usually arranges objects in a room so that they can be viewed and admired, while a culturally poor





The Castle of Bonpien (France),
oil on canvas, 80 x 100cm (31½ x 39")



Art Studio, oil on canvas, 80 x 60cm (31 x 24")

This is the studio of a friend of mine, which I like very much because it is full of interesting objects, especially the death mask of Aleksandr Pushkin, the founder of modern Russian literature.



Roman Morning, oil on canvas, 50 x 40cm (19³/₄ x 16")

This is the interior of a house in downtown Rome. The open window, which seems a painting on the wall, shows the *palazzo di Spagna*, the Square of Spain.

person usually will deploy objects in a room according to use and utility.

In general I do not clutter a painting with objects, preferring only to incorporate those objects that are meaningful and sufficient to convey the people who live there.

Choosing the right support

After I have decided all these symbolic things I choose the support. The kind of support generally depends on the type of painting, the level of detail to be presented, and the location in which the finished painting will be displayed. My support can be linen canvas, plywood, or a sheet of copper. Copper as a support was

used in the 17th and 18th Centuries. Silver must be applied to the copper to prevent future oxidation, but this extremely smooth surface is excellent for precise painting and great details.

Once I have the support I then begin making the sketch and proceed to painting.

Color-wise, I always start with warm colors, carefully avoiding the use of white. As with many masters of the past, I have an instinctive fear of the use of white in the initial phase of a new work. In general I proceed from the darker colors toward the clearer ones, and from the easier parts of a picture toward the more difficult parts.

British Embassy in Moscow, 1905, oil on canvas, 80 x 60cm (31 x 24")



A labor of love

While I am working I frequently find myself falling in love with the new painting. I live with my new work for weeks and I created it day by day as a creature of my own. The great John Singer Sargent once said, "Every time I paint a portrait I lose a friend." But when I deliver any newly completed painting, it feels like I am losing a piece of myself.

I have gained many awards for my paintings, but I do not count them. In fact I feel myself to be a true artist only when people who appreciate my works bestow on me that sacred title. □

***BIG Business*, oil on canvas, 50 x 60cm (19 3/4 x 23 3/4")**

The newly enriched Moscovian businessman in the portrait has made great businesses, some lawful (working on his desk), others unlawful (working behind the curtain).

“When I deliver the newly completed work, I feel I am losing a piece of myself.”

***Coffee Smell*, oil on canvas, 30 x 20cm (12 x 8")** ▶

I painted this small picture at a time when I particularly liked painting Oriental-style interiors.





Versace Interior, oil on canvas, 60 x 110cm (43 x 52½")
This is the interior of the Gianni Versace mansion in Lago di Como, Italy.



Oriental Bathroom, oil on canvas, 80 x 60cm (31 x 24")



***Sine Arte Vacat*, oil on wood, 33 x 28cm (13 x 11")**
The title is Latin for "Life is empty without art." The open and empty cage symbolizes that without art, life is an empty cage. The Venus statue is part of the Villa Borghese museum in Rome.



***Freshness*, oil on canvas, 30 x 20cm (12 x 8")**



About the artist

Alexander Sergeeff was born in Moscow, Russia, in 1968. He started painting at age 5. Winning his first art prize at age 9, he was soon enrolled in the Middle School of Art. Greatly influenced by Diego Velázquez and John Singer Sargent, he studied at both the Moscow Institute of Arts and the Russian Academy of Painting. Invited to Rome in 1990, he fell in love with the light and beauty of the place and immigrated to Italy. He now works in his studio in Rome. He paints

portraits and commissions in which, for example, clients ask him to include a particular memento in the background. His art has been featured in numerous publications, including a special Italian edition of *Architectural Digest*, and has appeared in exhibitions in Moscow, Rome, Paris, Madrid, Barcelona, and Stockholm, as well as exhibitions in the United States from Connecticut to California. Visit his website at www.artsasha.com/english.htm