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Saturday 28 March, 2015

THE SANTIAGO TIMES  
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[Lifestyle](#)

# Claudio Bravo, World-Acclaimed Chilean Artist, Dies At 74

By [Zach Simon](#)

Published On : Tue, Jun 7th, 2011

**After a career that spanned over 50 years, realist painter Claudio Bravo died in southern Morocco, where he lived for the last four decades**

Claudio Bravo, arguably Chile's most renowned realist painter, died of a heart attack brought on by an epileptic attack Saturday at the age of 74 in Taroudant, Morocco, where he had lived since 1972. Both acclaimed and slammed by critics, Bravo and his exhibits always managed to make international headlines.

"It's a great loss for Chilean, Latin American and international art," Chilean painter Gonzalo Cienfuegos told El Mercurio. "It's a gigantic loss because he was a man who had so much to communicate, to deliver to new generations. He never gave instructional classes, but he was a great master. His insight was always very assertive and focused. He was strong, demanding, keen and refined. Because of that, he became one of the most expensive artists on the international market. He had a remarkable career."

Friends report that humility was not his strongest characteristic and self-confidence was not something he lacked.

"I'm one of the few painters who have earned money," Bravo told El Mercurio shortly before he died. "I'm not like Van Gogh, who never sold a painting in his life. I'm a painter who has had success. I'm egotistical, but not overly so! Miguel Ángel, Leonardo, Francis Bacon, Vermeer and Velázquez were prodigies, but I'm a man without false modesty."

"(Former Queen and Empress of Iran) Farah Diba, who continuously visits me in Taroudant, among other members of royalty, has told me that she sees me as a prince. I don't feel far from that," Bravo said.

His painting "Paquete Blanco" (White Package) sold for over US\$1 million in 2004 at British auction house Sotheby's.

Bravo's fame in Chile experienced a huge bump in 1994 when a retrospective exhibit of his works at the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes (National Museum of Fine Arts) surprisingly drew over 280,000 people to the museum to view his paintings.

in Morocco and was virtually unknown here in Chile. He had never had much Chilean coverage, but people came in droves nonetheless.”

Born in Valparaíso in 1936, Bravo began to draw horses as a boy on his family’s farm in Melipilla, Chile. He had clear aspirations of being the best painter in the world. Although his father disapproved of his dedication to the arts, he joined the Colegio San Ignacio art school in Santiago in 1945, where he studied under Santiago artist Miguel Venegas Cifuentes.

He had his first amateur exhibition in 1954 at age 17 at the Salón 13 gallery in Santiago. By the early 1960s Bravo had established himself in Concepción as a portraitist.

Later that decade, Bravo relocated to Madrid, where his reputation as a leading portraitist spread. The realistic nature of his portraits, along with his ability to depict complex objects and shapes earned him comparisons to Spanish Baroque master Diego Velázquez.

Prominent figures he has painted include Spanish dictator Francisco Franco, Filipino President Ferdinand Marcos First Lady Imelda Marcos of the Philippines, and American millionaire Malcolm Forbes.

After being invited to the Philippines in 1968 to paint the president and his wife, Bravo had his first professional international exhibit in the Staempfli Gallery in New York City in 1970. Renowned New York Times art critic John Canaday gave the exhibit rave reviews; however, several years later, when Bravo’s work began to reflect the hippie movement, Canaday referred to his work as “cheap and vulgar.”

Works by Bravo are currently included in the collections of various museums in New York City; Baltimore; Philadelphia; Santiago; Mexico City; Rotterdam, Netherlands; and Cologne, Germany.

“I’m ready to die, if God so wishes it,” he said in one of his last interviews. “Dying will put an end to my need for creativity. I will lie down and sleep restfully for eternity. I’m ready because I’ve finished with my talents. Although I do reserve the belief I can still create marvelous things, I am not clinging to life.”

Despite his penchant for self-proclamation, Bravo also participated in various philanthropic enterprises.

“I want to do things that will help children and the sick, like my uncle’s institutions in Melipilla (Chile) and Cartagena (Colombia),” he said. He later donated to a hospital in Taroudant, a small village in south Morocco, where one of his four estates is located.

It was on that estate that he spent his last years, surrounded by waiters, cooks, gardeners and secretaries. He raised Arabian horses solely to give away as gifts. He would paint for eight hours a day or more. However, that passion did not translate to romance outside of art. For more than the last two decades of his life, the famed Chilean painter was celibate.

“That (romantic love) was very complicated for me,” he told El Mercurio. “I’m too passionate and jealous. I decided that my paintings and my animals were my best sources of love. I don’t think I’ve had anyone in my bed since I was 50. I got tired of it.”

The Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes just closed an exhibit this past Sunday titled “Del Culto al Salón,” (From Worship to the Living Room) in which some of Bravo’s work were on display ([ST, April 20](#)).

Museum administrator Paula Fiamma told The Santiago Times there are not yet any plans to display any special Bravo exhibits at the museum.

SOURCES: EL MERCURIO, LA TERCERA

By Zach Simon ([editor@santiagotimes.cl](mailto:editor@santiagotimes.cl))

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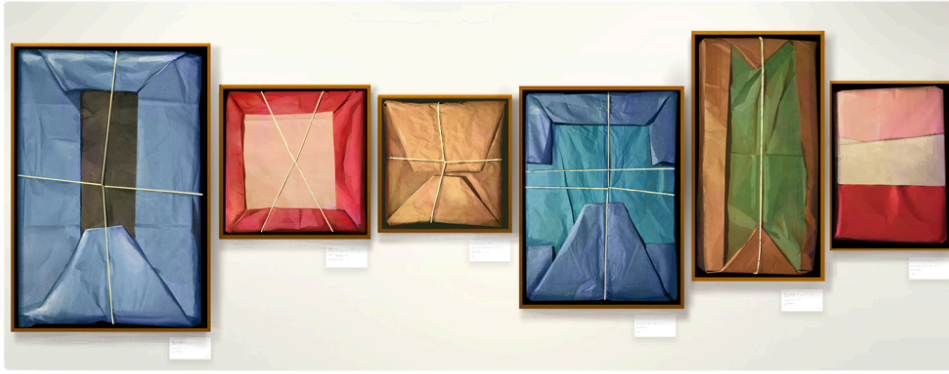
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## About the Author



**Zach Simon**

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● Nov 08, 2019

# Claudio Bravo Camus' 83rd Birthday

## This Doodle's Key Themes

Painting

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Today's Doodle celebrates the esteemed Chilean artist Claudio Bravo Camus, who fused the classical technique of Spanish Baroque painters with a touch of Salvador Dali-esque surrealism.

Born in Valparaíso on this day in 1936, Bravo grew up on a ranch in Melipilla. After dancing for the *Compañía de Ballet de Chile* and acting at the Catholic University of Chile, he applied his talents to visual arts. Despite his father's objections, the largely self-taught artist persisted, displaying his paintings at a well-known Valparaíso gallery by the age of 17.

In the 1960s Bravo moved to Spain and became a portrait painter with prominent clients, including the family of General Francisco Franco and Philippine leaders Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos. His 1970 exhibition at New York's Staempfli Gallery featured large still-lives of mysteriously mundane objects painted in a vivid, technically flawless style reminiscent of masters like Velázquez. Upon moving to Tangier, Morocco, Bravo expanded his repertoire to animal portraits and landscapes.

Bravo's work was sometimes compared to so-called photo-realist painters, but he did not work from photographs. "Always I have relied on the actual subject matter," he said, mentioning Mark Rothko's abstract color-field paintings as an influence. "The eye sees so much more than the camera: half tones, shadows, minute changes in the color or light."

The Doodle artwork focuses on his iconic series of mysterious packages wrapped in paper and tied with string, which brought him notoriety starting in the 1960s. The canvases blend a Pop Art sensibility with Claudio's mastery of *trompe-l'oeil* painting so realistic it can "trick the eye."

A 1994 retrospective of Bravo's work at the National Museum of Fine Arts in Santiago attracted over a quarter of a million visitors.

**Q: When did you first learn about Claudio Bravo Camus? What part of his story do you find most inspiring personally?**

**A:** *Claudio's dedication to learning and mastering hyperrealism is inspiring. I like that he persisted with his training in classical art during an age where modernity and experimental art scenes were in vogue— there's something deeply satisfying in seeing the mark-making in his work and reflecting on his discipline over a lifetime.*

**Q: You chose to focus on Claudio's paintings of packages wrapped in paper and string. What was it about these works that resonated with you?**

**A:** *Claudio was a master of conveying realism—he could render anything, so it was a hard choice at first to decide what to focus on for a Doodle tribute to him. I found it most intriguing that for a period of time, he chose to capture the forms of humble, mysterious packages. He found beauty and landscapes within the geometry of crinkled paper, and it seemed like a meditative process, so as an artist I wanted to explore and see if I could capture the spirit of his interest in a Doodle.*

**Q: What was your creative approach for the Doodle in celebrating Claudio Bravo Camus' 83rd Birthday?**

**A:** *Once I had a concept paying homage to his parcel paintings, I had to problem-solve how to involve the logo. The Doodle team discussed, and we landed on painting multiple packages, each representing a Google letter in color. I made them in real life for reference (as I assumed Claudio would have), and had these six packages strung up against a black tarp in a corner of my room for two weeks while painting them digitally. Finally, I composited the paintings into a larger gallery painting.*

**Q: Are there any technical tricks that you used in this Doodle that you can share?**

**A:** *Even though I had a physical still life of the boxes set up for observation lighting reference, for convenience I also took photos of each box to have reference on-hand as I painted. I also composited the box photos as an underpainting/collage so I could measure out within the given space for the Doodle.  
The rest was 95% digital painting, rendering, and time.*

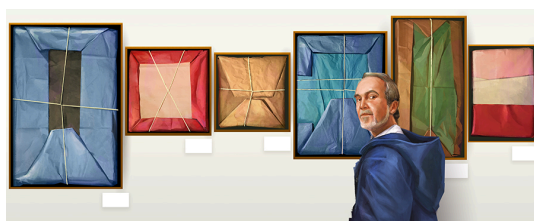
*Something that I found really neat to study while painting was Claudio's technique of trompe l'oeil. He made objects feel elevated from the mundane to a degree even more heightened than reality. Through his keen powers of observation, he was able to render subtle colors, crisp edges, lighting, and temperature changes, and multiple visual moments throughout wrapped parcels in a way that a photograph would be unable to capture.*

**Q: What do you hope people will take away from this Doodle?**

**A:** *I hope they'll feel curious to explore Claudio Bravo's body of artwork. He is a master artist who painted so much throughout his life. I hope they will then feel inspired to spot the little character-giving details in everyday objects, rooms, and spaces in real life, and see the beauty in them the way Claudio did.*

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Early concepts of the Doodle



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## Where this Doodle appeared



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HOME / ART HISTORY

# Claudio Bravo: A Prolific Portrait Artist Who Painted the Humble Beauty of Paper Packages

By Emma Taggart on August 15, 2020





עוד באינסטגרם

218 לייקים

הוספת תגובה...

With a career spanning six decades, the late Chilean artist **Claudio Bravo** (1936 – 2011) is considered one of the greatest realist painters of his time. He created around 500 artworks during his life that included paintings,

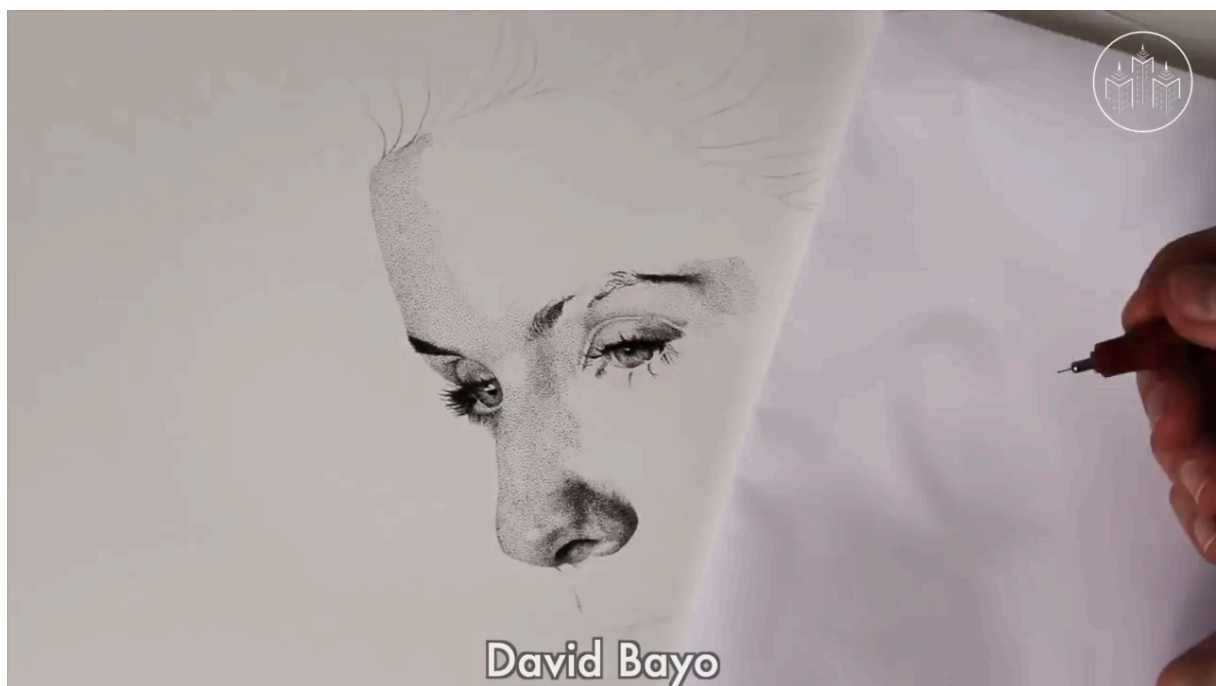
allowed him to stand out among his contemporaries.

Bravo is perhaps best-known for his hyperrealistic depictions of paper packaging. Inspired by Rothko's paintings that employ fields of color, he depicted paper as abstracted blocks of color while still emphasizing the material's tactile qualities. Through his use of *trompe l'oeil* (a technique meaning "to deceive the eye"), Bravo created the illusion of photo-like, three-dimensionality in his paintings.

Read on to learn about Bravo's life and works.

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#### FEATURED VIDEO



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## Claudio Bravo's Early Life



עוד באינסטגרם

302 לייקים

הוספת תגובה...

Born on November 8, 1936, in Valparaíso, Chile, Claudio Nelson Bravo Camus was the eldest son in a family of seven children. His father, Tomás Bravo Santibáñez, was a wealthy landowner who had three ranches. Bravo was expected to follow in his father's

He once said, “I always thought I had a great responsibility being the oldest male child. I wanted to get rid of it and become a painter. I refused to have anything to do with my family's business affairs.”

As a young boy, Bravo was formally educated in Jesuits schools in Santiago. Obsessed with drawing, he filled his notebooks with doodles. His passion paid off. In 1945, the Prefect of his elementary school discovered them and decided he had talent. He took Bravo to the studio of Miguel Venegas, and the boy began studying art. Naturally, Bravo's father didn't approve, and often warned him with harsh words, saying, “You'll starve. You'll be a flop, a bum.” In contrast, Bravo's mother, Laura Camus Gómez (who was an amateur artist in her youth) fully supported her son's artistic endeavors.

Bravo studied under Venegas for three years, which was the only formal instruction the artist ever received during his lifetime. Impressively, he had his first exhibition in 1954 at the age of 17 at the prestigious Salón 13 in Valparaíso, where he sold every piece of work. During this time, Bravo discovered his love for European art, and many of his early works were influenced by **Pablo Picasso**, especially his **Blue Period**. Around the same time, Bravo also discovered the work of surrealist artist **Salvador Dalí**, who became a huge influence in his later pieces.

Bravo claims that he was never inspired by Latin American painters or his own cultural background. “I am only South American because of my passport.” he once said. “My art has nothing to do with my heritage. I am very connected to ancient art, to **Renaissance art**. Even when I do a painting of a contemporary scene, as in my New York pictures, its roots are in Italian art of the 15th century.”

Along with painting, the young artist also dabbled in writing poetry, professional dancing, and acting for the Teatro de Ensayo of the Catholic University. However, he soon decided to dedicate all of his time to his art. He moved to Concepción, a city several hundred miles south of Santiago. He lived there for four years, where he became a prolific portrait painter.

## From Portraits to Paper Packages





עוד באינסטגרם

222 ליליקים

הוספת תגובה...

Feeling dissatisfied by his surroundings in Concepción, Bravo moved to Spain in 1961. There, he continued to paint portraits; some of his subjects were part of the country's elite, including the daughter of General Francisco Franco. He was invited in 1968 to visit



Although prolific and talented at capturing likenesses, portrait painting began to lose its cachet for the artist. When talking about his process, Bravo said, “I learned a certain formula for doing portraits that allowed me to do them very quickly. I'd paint two or three a week, with a facility that I have long ago lost.” He adds, “I did them in pastel, oil, and other media, but I began to get really bored.”

This boredom sparked a shift in Bravo's focus, and he began painting paper packages and bags in a hyperrealistic style. These *trompe-l'oeil* paintings brought him fame and allowed him freedom from portrait painting.



עוד באינסטגרם

442 לייקים

הוספת תגובה...

The inspiration to paint these everyday items happened organically. “Three of my sisters had come to stay with me from Chile.” recalled Bravo. “One day one of them came home with a number of packages and placed them on the table. I was fascinated



*"Claudio Bravo Camus' 83rd Birthday Google Doodle by Shanti Rittgers. (Photo: Google)"*

The package works were immensely successful for Bravo. In 2004, Sotheby's sold his 1967 painting titled *White Package* for more than \$1 million. Google even paid homage to Bravo on his 83rd birthday with a **Doodle** inspired by these paintings. "I found it most intriguing that for a period of time, he chose to capture the forms of humble, mysterious packages," Shanti Rittgers, the creator of the Doodle says. "He found beauty and landscapes within the geometry of crinkled paper, and it seemed like a meditative process, so as an artist I wanted to explore and see if I could capture the spirit of his interest in a Doodle."

## Claudio Bravo's Final Years



עוד באינסטגרם

262 לייקים

הוספת תגובה...

By 1972, Bravo had long left Spain and was living in New York. But that year, he decided to pack up and start a new life in Morocco. He ultimately landed in Tangier. "Places like Fez or Marrakesh are too hot in summer and too cold in winter," said the

During this time, Bravo's paintings evoked the vibrancy and mystery of Tangier and its people. Islamic women, however, refused to pose for him, so he often only painted male subjects.

In 2000, the artist established his winter residence in Marrakesh and began dividing his time between the capital of Morocco and his residence of Tangier. He lived in the country up until his death on June 4, 2011.

## Enjoy More of Bravo's Hyperrealistic Paintings:



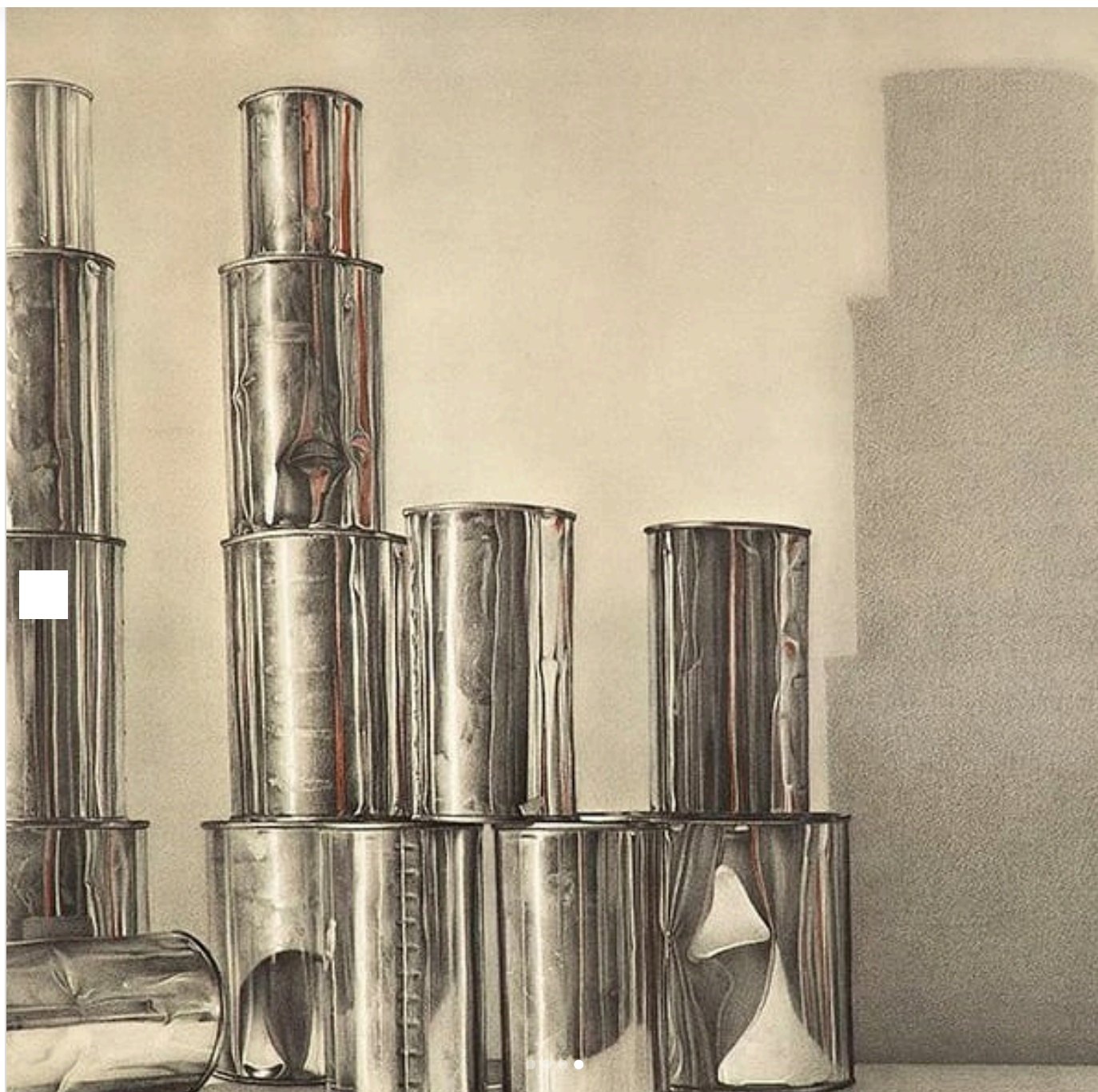


עוד באינסטגרם

192 לייקים

הוספת תגובה...





עוד באינסטגרם

235 לייקים

הוספת תגובה...

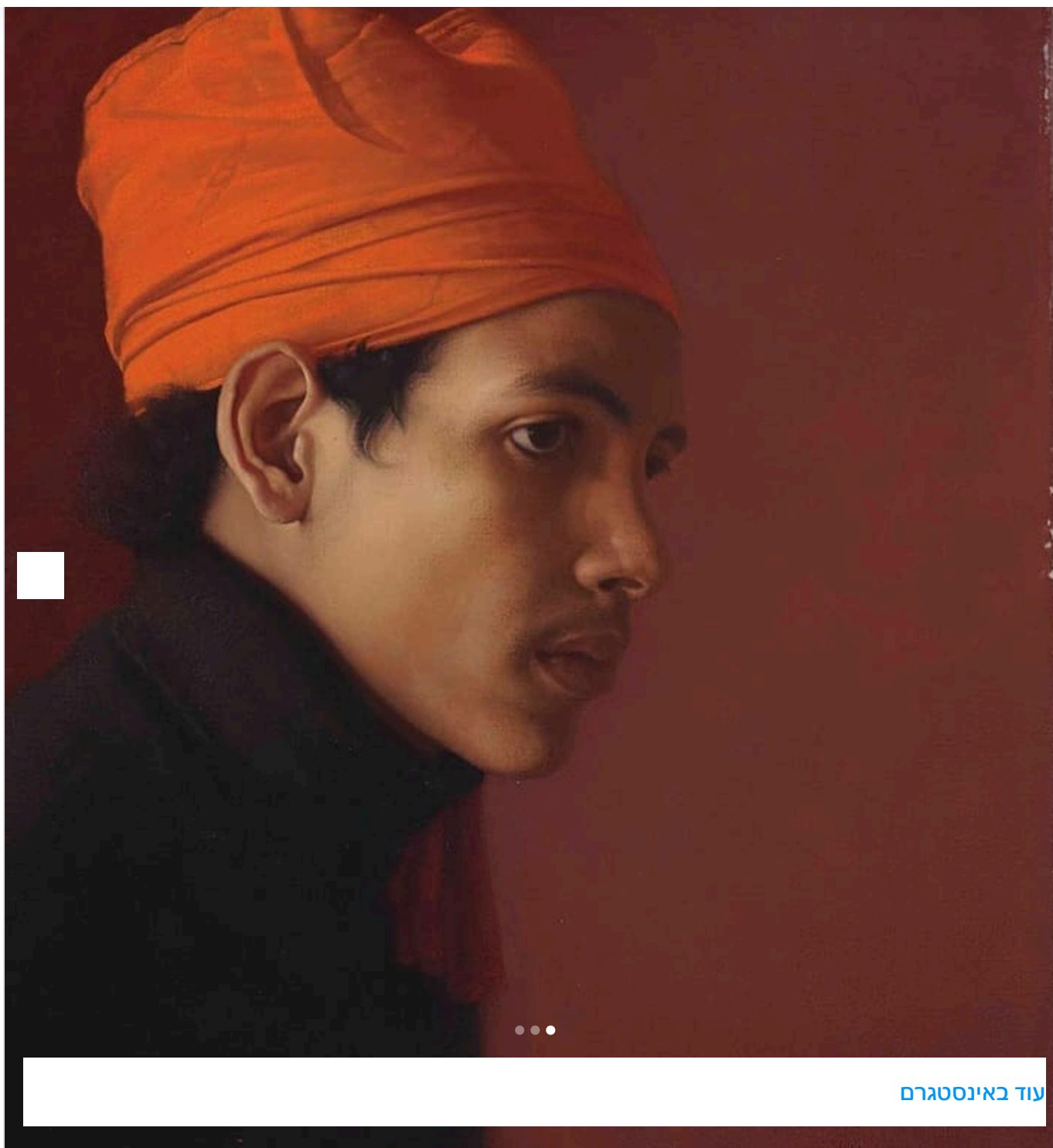


עוד באינסטגרם

224 לייקים

הוספת תגובה...

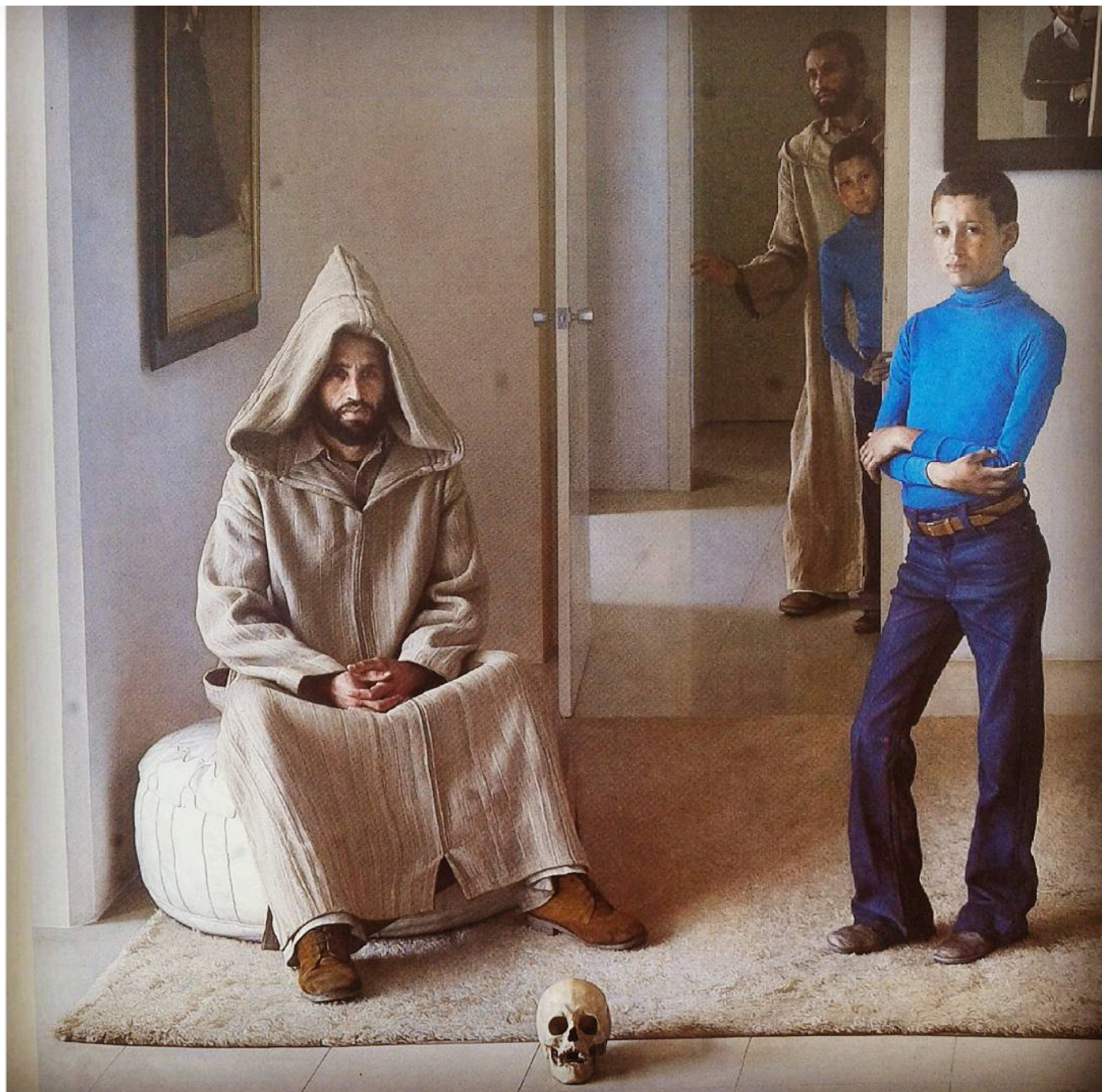




עוד באינסטגרם

310 לייקים

הוספת תגובה...



עוד באינסטגרם

213 לילקים

הוספת תגובה...

Claudio Bravo: [Website](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Instagram](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Pinterest](#) | [Tumblr](#)

*All images via Claudio Bravo.*



Blog » Art History and Education

# The Great Chilean Master: Claudio Bravo

DORA AGUERO

May 20, 2024

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on the art world with his masterful hyperrealist paintings and impeccable technique. Born in Valparaíso, Chile, in 1936, Bravo's journey to becoming an artist encountered initial difficulties, but ultimately soared to unimaginable success.

## CLAUDIO BRAVO'S CHILDHOOD AND EARLY INFLUENCES

Claudio Bravo was the eldest son of Tomas Bravo and Laura Camus, among nine siblings. He was born into a well-to-do family, with his father owning extensive land and cattle. Bravo's love for art blossomed at an early age. Growing up in Valparaíso, he was surrounded by the vibrant colors and bustling streets of the port city. His mother ensured exposure to art by frequently taking him and his sisters to museums, cultivating in them a deep appreciation for the arts. Claudio was captivated by the works he saw, which paved the way for his artistic journey.

However, his father was opposed to his son pursuing art, even going as far as berating him and predicting financial hardship. Despite this, Bravo found support from the prefect of his primary school, who introduced him to Miguel Venegas. Under Venegas's mentorship, Bravo spent about a month in his workshop without his father's knowledge. When his father discovered Claudio's pursuits, he reluctantly allowed him to continue, albeit with protest. Bravo's early influences included the works of Spanish masters and the vibrant Chilean landscape. After three years with Venegas, he never received formal education in the arts again.

## BEGINNINGS IN THE ART WORLD

At the age of seventeen, Bravo had his first solo exhibition at Salon 13 in Santiago, where he sold out his collection. As his fame grew







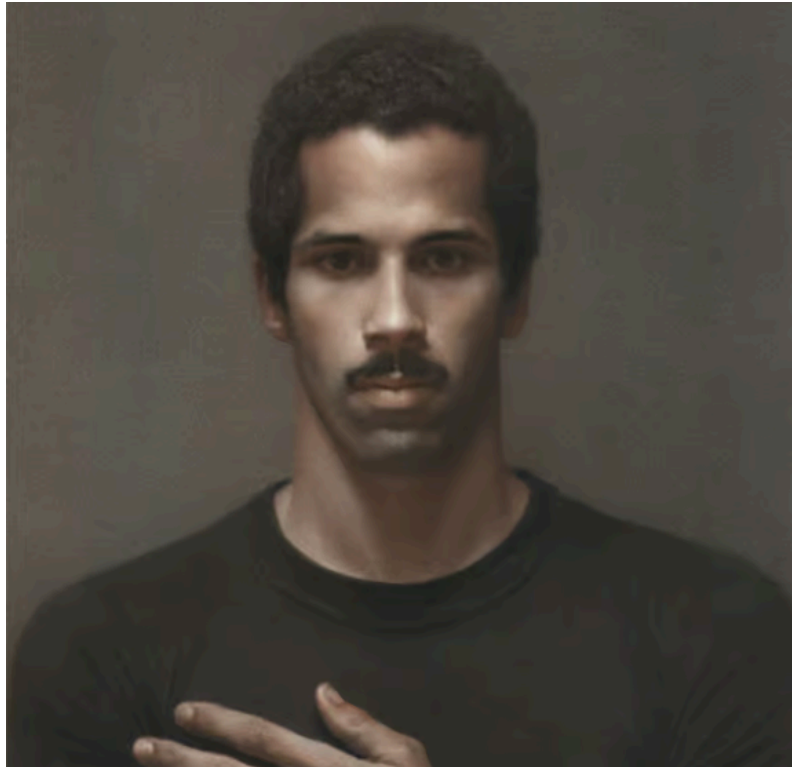
the 1960s, he moved to Europe, intending to settle in France. However, destiny led him to Madrid, Spain, where he found a new home and audience.

Settling in Madrid, Bravo immersed himself in the city's vibrant art scene, quickly gaining recognition for his hyperrealist portraits and still lifes. His meticulous attention to detail and extraordinary technical ability set him apart from his contemporaries, earning him widespread acclaim. Although he initially created portraits quickly, producing up to three a week, he soon found this routine dull. New opportunities in New York, combined with a visit from his sisters, led to one of his most successful creations.



*Portrait of A Man*, 1982, Color Pencil On Buff Paper,  
14 3/4 X 11 3/4 In.





*Hombre*, 1978, Pastel On Paper

19 7/8 X 18 In.

## CAREER TAKEOFF

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Bravo's career soared as he exhibited his work in prestigious galleries and museums worldwide. His hyperrealist paintings, characterized by exquisite detail and luminous quality, captivated audiences and collectors alike. Bravo's subjects ranged from everyday objects to portraits of notable figures, each rendered with astonishing realism.

One of Bravo's most iconic series originated from a visit from his sisters in New York. After they left some packages on his table, he began to admire the texture of the papers and was inspired by Mark Rothko's color fields. The resulting series, "Packages," exemplifies Bravo's ability to elevate ordinary objects into works of art, capturing texture and light in exquisite detail.





*Paper Bag*, Graphite and Chalk/Paper  
25 1/2 X 19 1/2 In.

## ESTABLISHING INTERNATIONAL REPUTATION

Bravo's reputation continued to grow as he exhibited in major galleries and museums worldwide. His work has been featured in major retrospectives at institutions such as the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes in Santiago and the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza in Madrid.

His paintings are held in collections of leading museums and private collectors worldwide, including The Metropolitan Museum





## LEGACY AND INFLUENCE

Later in life, Bravo moved to Tangier, finding the peace needed to distance himself from the excesses and demands of Madrid and New York's social circles. The Mediterranean light, prevalent in many of his pieces, influenced his work during this period.



*Messaoud*, 1977, Pastel on Paper

17 X 22 7/8 In.





*Limonas*, 1965, Drawing  
9 3/8 X 7 In.

Bravo's legacy extends beyond his artwork. He inspired a new generation of artists with his dedication to craft and commitment to artistic excellence. Among these are **Enrique Campuzano** and **Francisco Mery**, both fellow countrymen of Bravo. His hyperrealist style has left a lasting impact on the art world, influencing painters globally.

Claudio Bravo passed away on June 4th, 2011, leaving behind a rich legacy of art that continues to inspire and captivate audiences worldwide. His journey from a young artist in Chile to an internationally renowned painter is a testament to the power of incomparable talent, perseverance, and passion. His hyperrealist paintings continue to captivate viewers with their beauty and precision, ensuring that Bravo's legacy will endure for generations to come.

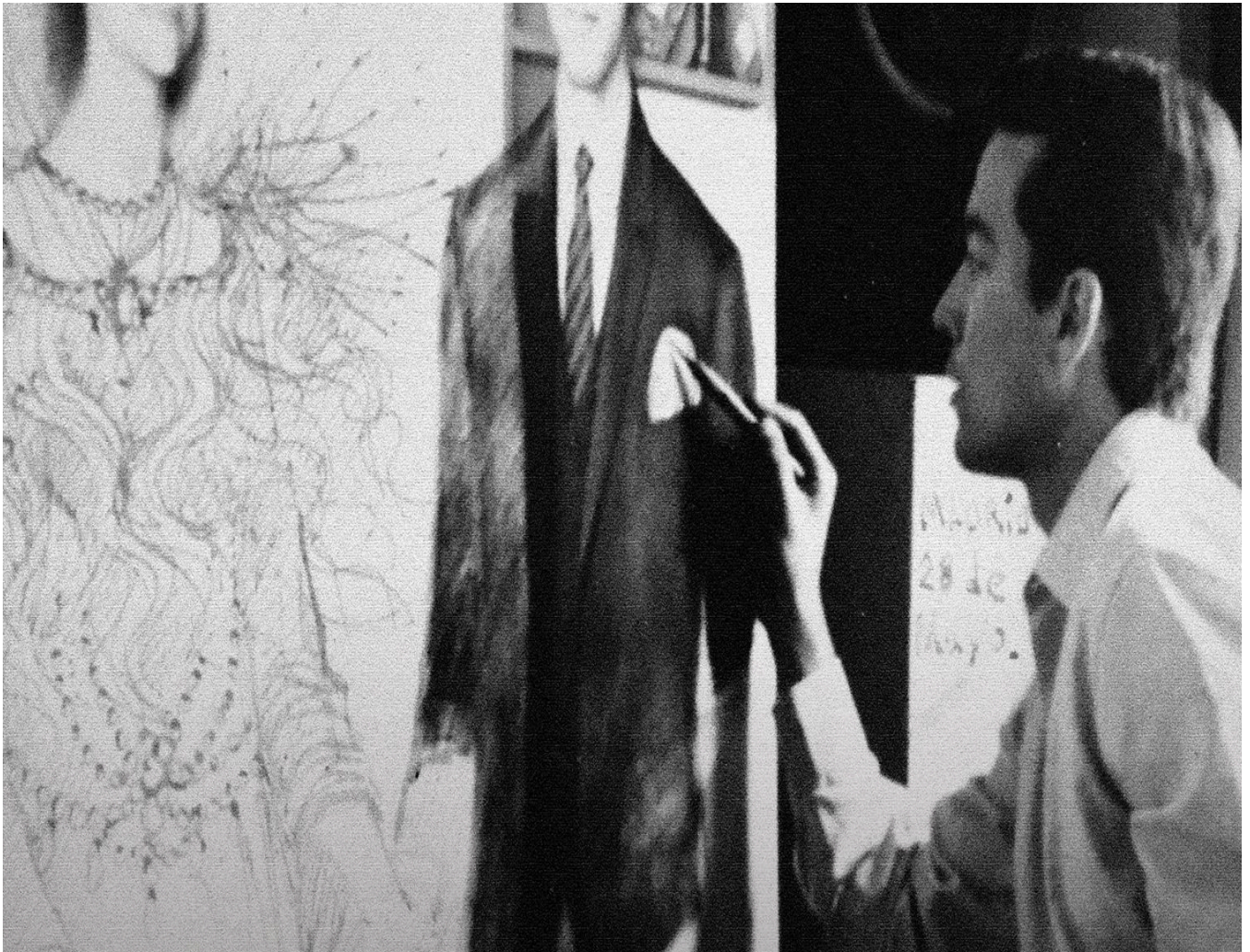




LIFESTYLE | ARTS

# The World-Renowned Portrait Artist Claudio Bravo And His Colourful Years In Manila

By Gus Vibal  
Apr 21, 2020



**COVER** Claudio Bravo painting Jaime and Bea Zobel de Ayala

Through his portraits, Claudio Bravo captured the opulence that fuelled the turbulence of an era

*This feature story was originally titled as Bravo in Manila, and was published in the September 2012 issue of Tatler Philippines*



Renowned the world over for the unique blend of hyperrealist and baroque Spanish-influenced art, Claudio Bravo was born on 8 November 1936 in the coastal town of Valparaíso, Chile. Largely self-taught, he displayed an early precocity for the arts, when as a young boy he badgered his friends and classmates to pose for his pencil drawings.

In his teens he spent his spare time fraternising with older artists and intellectuals, imbibing the bohemian life. At 17, he presented his first solo art show at Taller 14 in his hometown, helped by close friends. He performed as a dancer for the Compañía de Ballet de Chile and did occasional stints as an actor at the Teatro Ensayo of the Universidad Católica de Chile.

Like his contemporary Francis Bacon, he resettled in the '60s in Madrid, where he had fallen in love with the Spanish baroque painters prominently displayed at the Prado Museum. He admired the works of Diego Velázquez, Juan Sánchez Cotán and Francisco de Zurbarán with whom his own work shared a common aesthetic and technical virtuosity. In Madrid he achieved fame for society portraits that were done with astounding verisimilitude, executing over 300 works in less than eight years.



**ABOVE** Imelda Romualdez Marcos through the artist's eyes

In 1968 Bravo accepted an invitation from President Ferdinand E Marcos to visit the country and paint him and his wife, Imelda, who first saw one of his virtuosic portraits on the Christmas card of Don Jaime Zóbel de Ayala.

It was a watershed year in Philippine life and society. Marcos was on the verge of winning a landmark re-election with the help of his running mate, Vice President Ferdinand “Nanding” López, brother of Eugenio “Eñing” López, then considered the richest man in Philippine history. The Lópezes owned the most influential media, including the leading television station, 22 radio stations, the newspaper *Manila Chronicle*, as well as the lucrative electrical monopoly Meralco. They were the kingmakers and the power behind Marcos’ consolidation of political power.

The Lópezes’ ascendance to the top of the political and economic hierarchy was captured in what was dubbed as the most opulent event of the century.

In January 1968 Don Eñing and Doña Pacita “Nitang” López held their fabled ruby wedding anniversary where Dom Pérignon flowed out of a fountain made of Murano glass. A cast of royal nobility—Prince Alfonso de Borbón and Baron Hans Heinrich “Heini” Thyssen-Bornemisza of the famed museum—and international jetsetters—including the Agnellis of Fiat fame and Christina Ford—flown in from Europe, Asia and North America trooped to the López mansion in Parañaque.

That night as President Marcos and Imelda celebrated the two families’ alliance amidst the realities of crushing poverty and a general breakdown in civil society. There was no talk of “oligarchs,” the “First Quarter Storm” or Martial Law and little to indicate that the Lópezes and Marcoses would be parting ways in less than four years and rewriting the pages of Philippine history.

Against this backdrop, the Chilean artist went diligently to work in Manila from January to June of 1968, being referred from one prominent society figure to another.





**ABOVE** The artist at the ruby wedding anniversary of Eugenio and Pacita Lopez

## SOCIETY PORTRAITS

This was the era when cultural cognoscenti and tastemakers such as the First Lady, the artists Fernando Zobel and Arturo Luz curated an artistic and cultural agenda in line with Philippine ambitions and socio-political changes. For example, eyebrows were not lifted when the state staged the Bolshoi Ballet at the Cultural Centre or mounted internationally-at-par art exhibits featuring old European masters, modernist painters Picasso, Klee, or Gropius, even Imperial Chinese wares at the Metropolitan Museum, both venues becoming favourite gathering places of Manila's culturati.

It was also the era of society matrons such as Consuelo "Chito" Madrigal de Vazquez, Imelda "Meldy" Ongsiako de Cojuangco, Elvira Ledesma-Manahan, Maria "Baby" Araneta-Fores and Pacita "Nitang" Moreno married to Eugenio López. Jewellers of note Erlinda Oledan and Fe Panlilio draped these ladies with the finest gemstones while Ramon Valera, Roberto Paras,



Aureo Alonzo, Pitoy Moreno and Salvacion Lim-Higgins swaddled them in *ternos* and the finest European silks and Swiss eyelets.



**ABOVE** Imelda Ongsiako Cojuangco



**ABOVE** Chona Recto Ysmael Kasten

Bravo's favourites were the society women. He painted the Cojuangco women: Gretchen Oppen married to Eduardo "Danding" Cojuangco; Tingting, married to José "Peping" Cojuangco Jnr; and Imelda "Meldy" Ongsiako, married to Ramón Cojuangco Snr. Meldy's stunning portrait is characterised by its luminescent purple gown offset by a backdrop of shocking fuchsia, her face crowned by bouffant hair and a quarter of the canvas left unfinished. The artist would later add this tour de force work to his personal portfolio.

The López women were represented by portraits of Presentación "Presy" López, married to Steve Psinakis; Conchita La'O, married to Eugenio López Jnr; and the family matriarch, Doña Pacita López.



**PHOTO 1 OF 2** Maria Lourdes Araneta Forés

Prominent families of the '60s were captured by the painter, including Constantino and Elvira Manahan and son Constantino Jnr, as well as granddaughter Samantha Eduque. The Roxases were also captured by the Chilean painter, including Anton Roxas, Pamen Roxas de Elizalde and Pilar Roxas. The Zóbel's were also prominent among Bravo's sitters. The portrait of Don Jaime and Doña Bea was painted earlier in 1965; while the young Jaime Augusto, when he was just 10. There was Rocío Urquijo, married to Enrique Zóbel, with young Iñigo.

Atypical was his portrait of Don Fernando Zóbel, the painter, dressed in a cowl and surrounded by the medieval instruments of monastic life. The work was drained of all colours and exhibited a dreamlike composition. It is said that the portrait was poorly received by the sitter.

Other prominent personalities of the sixties were not forgotten. They included Chona Recto de Kasten, Marilou Prieto de Lovina, Leandro and Cecile Locsín, Mercedes Arrastia de Tuason, Tessie Ojeda de Luz, Maria "Baby" Araneta-Fores, Evelyn Lim Forbes, Mauro Prieto, Regina Dee, Aurelio Montinola Snr and Don Luis Araneta.





**ABOVE** Elvira Ledesma Manahan

As expected, Bravo reserved his best for the stunning larger-than-life depiction of the reigning First Lady of the land. She and her husband exuded “youth, glamour and a palpable sense of destiny.” In her court she had attracted the so-called Blue Ladies, recruited from the most socially prominent families, including several daughters of former presidents—Vicky Quirino de González, Linda García-Campos and Rosie Osmeña-Valencia. In Imelda’s cultural endeavours she attracted some members of Manila’s high society, who at that time were notoriously suspicious of parvenus or nouveau riche arrivistes with suspiciously gotten wealth. Only a handful of families constituted the so-called Manila 400, including the Aranetas, Cojuangcos, Madrigals, Yulos, Sorianos, Zóbel, Roxases and Tuason.

Bravo chose to portray the First Lady in the most austere colours which were offset by the dainty pink parasol in her delicate hands. Imelda’s dissident niece, Betsy Romuáldez- Francia, would later describe the work “as the way she saw herself or the way she wished to be perceived. In it she is lithe and limpid looking in a native dress. The portrait makes her look ethereal; she seems about to be swept heavenwards by a gust ...”



**ABOVE** Iñigo and Rocio Urquijo Zobel



**ABOVE** Mari Carmen Roxas Elizalde





**PHOTO 1 OF 4** Margarita de los Reyes Cojuangco

These society portraits exhibited none of the coldness or kitsch of the works of other hyperrealist painters like Audrey Flack or Chuck Close. They are portraits of prominent men and women in their ascendant mode, painted patiently and studiously, all in the flesh and not diligently from photographic records, as the artist himself insisted.

## HIGHS AND LOWS

With over 50 works in hand, bravo held his 7th one-man show at the Luz Gallery, then the vanguard gallery of Philippine modernist art movement. His stint in Manila transformed his use of colour, remarking that he found the light in the Philippines more intense than in Spain or in Chile. He sketched exquisite nudes. Natural, curated and found objects—like the lowly walis *tingting* (broom), or Chinese trade ware—in the homes of his patrons inspired him to paint *bodegones* or still-lives that rivalled some of the themes of great Spanish masters like Sánchez Cotán or Juan van der Hamen.

After his return from Manila, Bravo gathered a favourable review from The New York Times art critic John Canaday, who saw his first solo exhibition's dazzling *trompe-l'oeil* paper-wrapped packages at Staempfli Gallery in 1970. Although hyperreal in execution, Bravo's art did not follow the photorealists of the period who slavishly followed the rigours of photographic accuracy, even going to the extent of painting from projected images of photographs.



**PHOTO 1 OF 2** Bravo with Mercedes "Mercy" Arrastia-Tuason on canvas, 1960 inset

Bravo insisted on working from life, stating that "always I have relied on the actual subject matter, because the eye sees so much more than the camera: half tones, shadows, minute changes in the colour or light. I think I was working more in the tradition of the Colour Field artists, like Mark Rothko, whom I still greatly admire. There was also a touch of the Spanish artist Antoni Tàpies because he, too, did paintings involving string-across-a-canvas surface."

Born by the rise of realist artists vis-avis abstraction, Bravo achieved fame in New York, Madrid and Tangier.



In this Moroccan city, he established permanent residence in 1972, tired of a frivolous life and worn down by the demands of society portraiture. From that year on, Bravo rejected almost all demands for commissioned portraits, choosing only subjects that captured his imagination. Morocco brought his art to a newer and more varied terrain, expanding to new subject matters, including allegories, religious themes, landscapes, painted with a brighter and, some deemed, more shocking and aggressive colour palette.



**ABOVE** With the royals at the Lopez ruby wedding anniversary





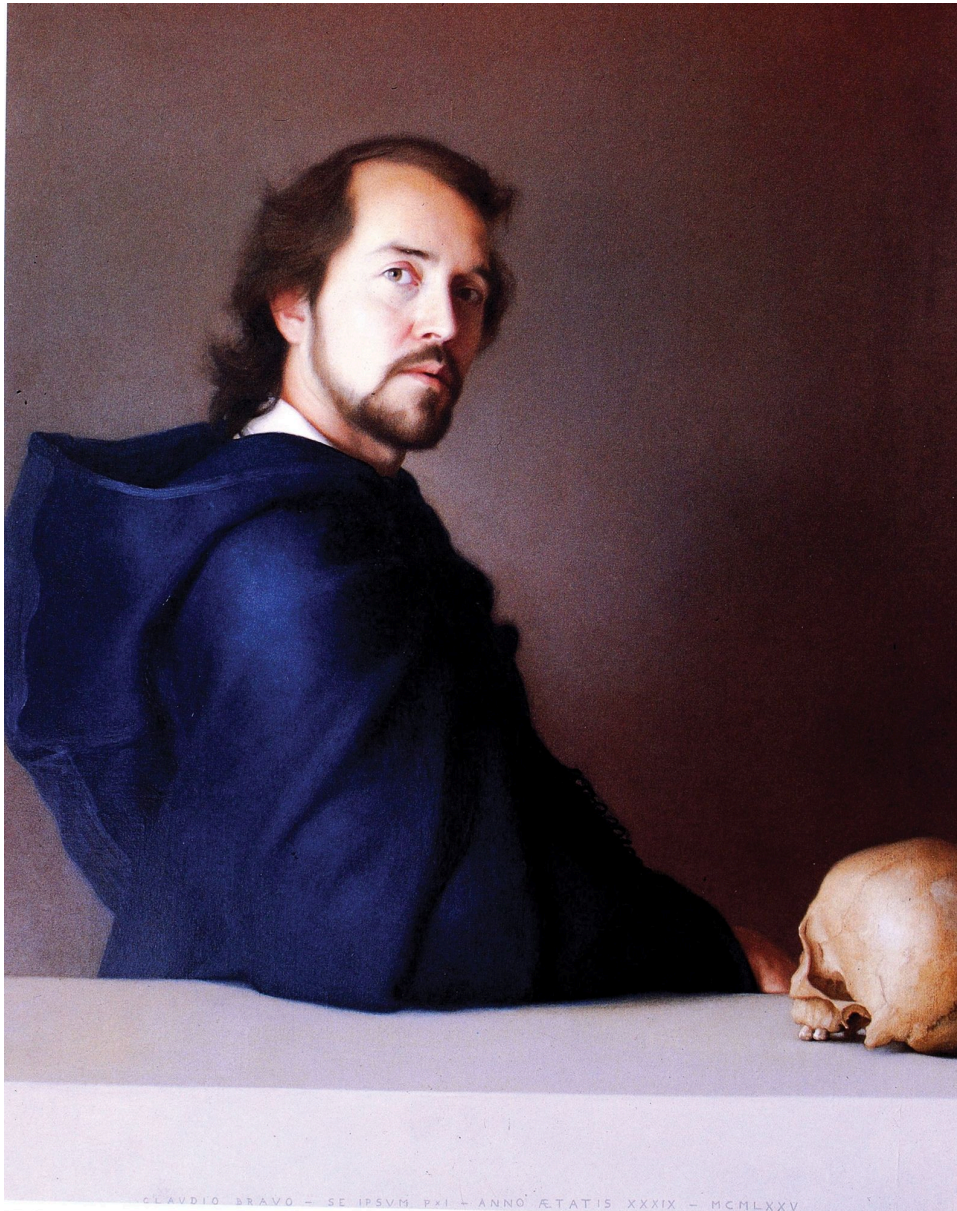
**ABOVE** At a black-tie dinner in his honour at Malacañan

Bravo's radical realism burst into the international art scene at the same time as the American photo-realists were ascendant, with the likes of Tom Blackwell, Chuck Close, Robert Cottingham, Don Eddy, Richard Estes and Audrey Flack. Unlike pop art, theirs was obsessed with the surface and how the surface transformed itself into illusion. Hyperrealism was the perfect antidote to the supremacy of abstraction.

In the 1980s Bravo's art took New York by storm, highlighted by his representation at one of the top-tier art galleries, Marlborough Gallery. In 1994 to Bravo's great surprise, his first



retrospective show in Chile at the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes drew more than a quarter-million visitors. He had spent more than 40 years of his artistic life abroad and was virtually unknown in his own country. In the early 21st century Bravo's works commanded prices in the stratosphere, with Sotheby's auctioning White Package, a 1967 painting, for more than a million dollars.



**ABOVE** Bravo's self portrait, 1975

Bravo enjoyed tremendous financial success, owning three villas in Morocco and apartments in Madrid, Tangier and New York. However, the trappings of a celebrity artist did not suit him.

In 2008 he removed himself from the whirlwind of the art world by retreating to Taroudant in the south of Morocco. He continued his creative life in a solitary and monastic way, working daily up to 10 hours at a stretch, and at times speaking of "the anguish of creativity." The artist

passed away in his adopted Moroccan village on 4 June 2011. His home, now converted into a museum, is maintained by Bachir Tabchich, his Moroccan friend of 32 years.



*Claudio Bravo's home in Taroudant is also his final resting place  
Photography: Sebastian Lapostol*

By Sebastian Lapostol (<https://trufflepig.com/?s=Sebastian+Lapostol>)  
Africa (/the-sounder/#!africa), Morocco (/category/morocco), Taroudant (/category/taroudant), The South (/category/the-south)

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# I, CLAUDIO

Speaking as both an individual of Chilean descent and a lover of all things Morocco, it took surprisingly long for Claudio Bravo to come into my orbit. Surely due in part to the fact that in neither Morocco nor Chile was Claudio Bravo ever particularly well known. Even to this day, no museum or art gallery in Morocco holds one of Claudio Bravo's works despite the fact that the last forty years of his life were spent in the Kingdom. As the saying goes, one is never a prophet in one's own (adopted) land.

Bravo was a hyper-realist painter, taking subjects and recreating them to such painstaking detail that when viewed they looked like photographs. Hyper-realism goes beyond photorealism, painting exact features of a subject (working from photographs), raised to an almost maniacal attention to detail injected with a narrative and sense of a new, previously unseen reality. The philosopher Jean Beaudrillard coined the term "hyper-real" to describe when consciousness loses ability to distinguish reality from fantasy, "the simulation of something that never really existed".

Bravo received very little formal training in art in Chile before moving to Europe to perfect his craft and spent years in Spain, painting portraits of high society. I can't help but think that his exposure in Madrid to works by Velazquez and Caravaggio in the Prado planted their influence in his painting style. In the 70s he wound up in Tangier (<https://trufflepig.com/tangier-episode/>), counting such literary figures as Paul Bowles as friends. He also formed a long term friendship with the Shah of Iran's widow, Farah Pahlavi, who would influence him to move to Marrakech and in the later part of his life to Taroudant, always in pursuit of ideal light conditions with which to paint.

Here, he built a villa worthy of a retired Roman senator or a feudal Pasha, an enormous patrician country estate with large rooms, verdant courtyards, patios with Indian antique furniture and murmuring fountains, a sizeable replica of Marrakech's Menara gardens, and most touchingly, a Moroccan *marabout*, (<https://trufflepig.com/moroccos-mystic-marabouts/>) or saint's tomb, the kind found dotted all over the country. It is here where his Moroccan caretakers decided to create an homage to him and where his body is buried. Today, Claudio Bravo's home and mausoleum make for one of Morocco's most unique museums (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AwJ2nVFEzdQ&feature=related>).

That Bravo's paintings hanging on the wall are not originals but replicas (his sisters inherited the paintings and took them back to Chile), is almost irrelevant – the way the house was constructed to take maximum advantage of the sun throughout the day, the play of light and shadow against the walls, the furnishings, the columns and patios, the objets d'art strewn throughout the house (Bravo was a prolific collector) create the effect of blurring what is art and what is real. It recalled for me the vignette in Akira Kurosawa's film *Dreams* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iKSUpYENTwo>), where a modern day admirer through magical circumstance walks through Van Gogh's actual paintings. Sauntering around his property one almost felt like an intruder, that at any moment Claudio Bravo could walk in. Personal effects, furniture, his stylish De Velasco capes, all have been left in their place, even Bravo's toothbrush and preferred shaving cream still stand on the bathroom sink.

While he was still alive, Peruvian writer Mario Vargas Llosa wrote in a foreword to a photo-book collection of Bravo's work: "It is not in the least surprising to come across the faces who posed for his Christs, martyrs and anchorites, his Madonnas and diviners, his bird charmers, dancers and musicians, his characters from mythology...They are in the kitchens, they are the family of the caretaker, the gardeners, the cleaning ladies, the man who looks after the pigeons."

Bravo lived his life with his personal secretary Bachir Tabchich and Bachir's family, who along with members of his old staff still live on site, maintaining the property, and offering visits of the home by appointment. When I met Bachir he was delighted to learn I was of Chilean origin and proudly walked me through the home, pointing out reproductions, pieces of Bravo's collection that made for subjects of his paintings, the dining room where Bravo's glitzy expat friends would wine and dine the evenings away ("This was Jacques Chirac's seat, and this place was always reserved for Farah Diba"). In the delightful and cluttered studio the chair and easel at which he was working was still set and the last subject he was painting, a red cape, still hanging on the wall. It was here that Bravo suffered two heart attacks before passing away in 2011.

ACCEPT



The museum and Taroudant take some effort to visit, and the destination is not one of the more obvious highlights of a trip to Morocco – all the better for Taroudant and those looking to go beyond the obvious and get away from the usual tourist masses. It can make a great couple night’s stop on a longer Morocco trip between Essaouira, the High Atlas, and the desert. With the once legendary Gazelle d’Or closed now for years, it’s out in the dusty Palmeraie quarter where you’ll find the best place to stay. Most residents still live *intramuros*, as Taroudant never had the French *ville nouvelle* associated with cities such as Fes or Marrakech. Incidentally in the Palmeraie is the residence of Pahlavi herself, who still spends part of the year in Taroudant. Aside from an extensive and well preserved medieval *pisé* wall and a fully functioning local Medina, Taroudant lacks the obvious tourist attractions but exudes a faded nostalgic calm and sense of discovery.

Before bidding Bachir and the Claudio Bravo museum farewell, I peeked into Bravo’s bedroom, and spotted on his bedside table a well worn copy of *Don Quijote*. I can imagine him at night before bedtime poring over Cervantes’ words and pondering the story of the crazed knight tilting at his windmills. It seems a most fitting eulogy for the life of an artist: “When life itself seems lunatic, who knows where madness lies? Perhaps to be too practical is madness. To surrender dreams – this may be madness. Too much sanity may be madness – and maddest of all: to see life as it is, and not as it should be!”

*When Sebastian’s not tilting towards his own windmills, he spends a lot of time creating Morocco trips so good they’re surreal. Get in touch ([sebastian@trufflepig.com](mailto:sebastian@trufflepig.com)) to get planning.*

*“Sauntering around his property one almost felt like an intruder, that at any moment Claudio Bravo could walk in.”*

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ACCEPT



# Claudio Bravo. 1936 - 2011

2 May – 8 Jun 2013 at Marlborough Gallery in New York, United States

29 MAY 2013



Claudio Bravo, Marjana azul / Blue Marjana, 2008, Oil on canvas, 51 x 63 3/4 inches

The Directors of Marlborough Gallery announce an exhibition of paintings by the preeminent realist painter, Claudio Bravo. This will be the artist's first show since his untimely demise in 2011 and will consist of approximately 40 oils on canvas which were executed during the time he was represented by Marlborough.

Bravo's command and understanding of the effects of light were the hallmark of his career of more than fifty years. He proved that he could paint any subject he chose, and his oeuvre was marked by consummate treatments of the human figure, both nude and clothed, still lifes, portraits, interiors, religious and mythological subjects, drapery and colored papers as subjects in themselves, and to a lesser extent landscapes and cityscapes. Perhaps his most famous subject was the paintings of "packages" which take on a surreal, other-worldly quality and whose essence could be said to transcend their physicality into a mystic aura of religious contemplation.

The show will feature four large triptychs as well as two paintings of this quintessential, unique subject. While the show will also offer the chance to see several superb examples of the artist's most minimal subject: the ineffably beautiful paintings of colored papers, the exhibition's greater body of work will be devoted to still lifes and will show Bravo's highly finished technique in the treatment of this timeless theme. His mastery of this subject will be seen in all manner of forms and materials such as in ceramic pottery, lamb skins, aluminum foil, straw baskets, clay amphoras, stones, machinery, cloth, plants, flowers, water, among others. One could say that the physical surface that Bravo could not conquer did not exist. In all his work "he consistently pushes boundaries, periodically referencing elements from Surrealism, abstraction, minimalism, Pop art, and even photorealism, though he works from life, not photographs." The high achievement of his paintings lies in the nature of their seeming simplicity, a simplicity which belies their complexity and which arrives at clarifying painting's formal values of line, form, and color. They are classic and modern, detailed and reductive, imaginative and inventive.

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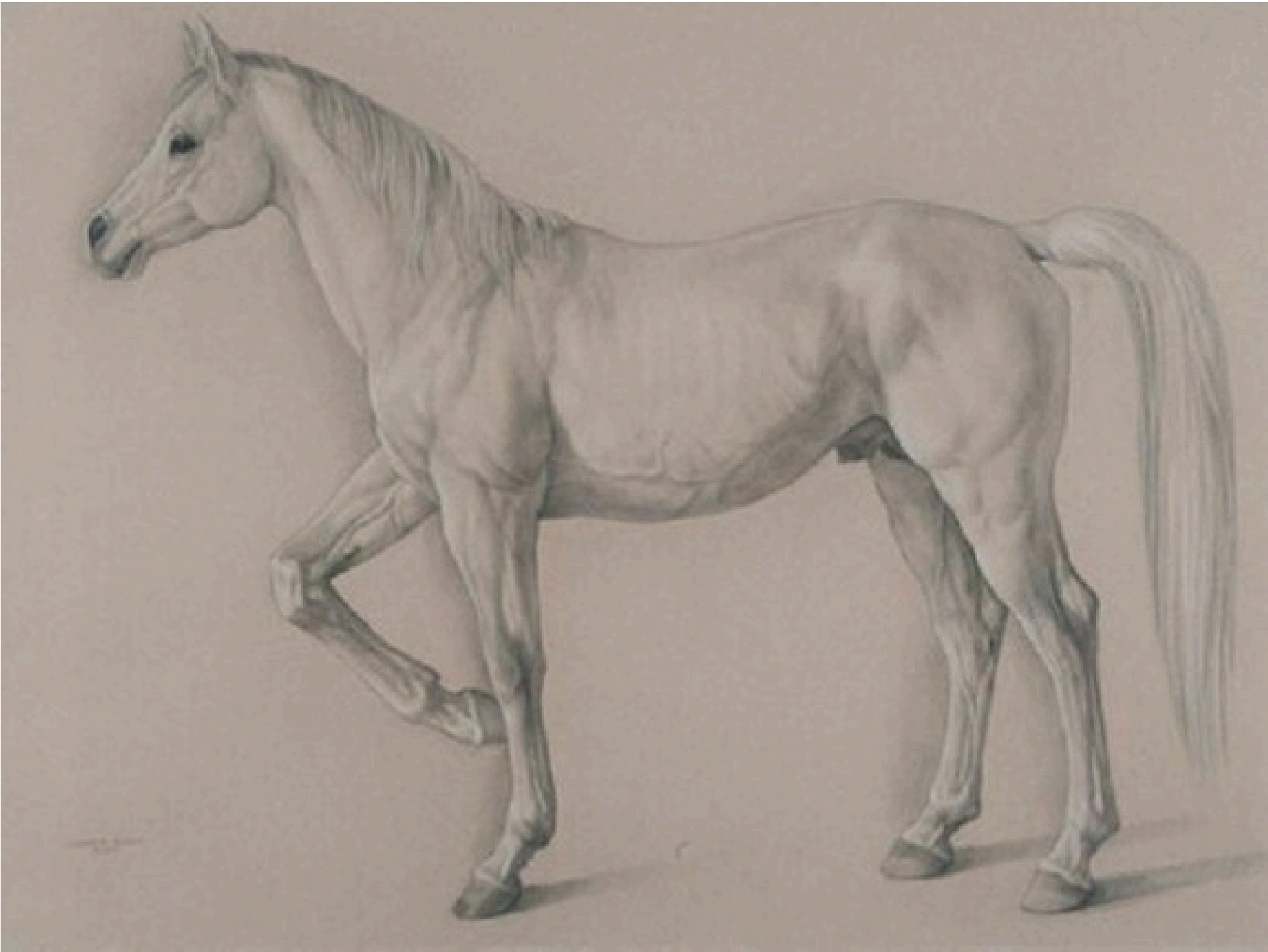


## Marlborough Gallery

Marlborough is an art gallery showcasing modern and contemporary artworks and exhibitions with locations in New York, London, Madrid and Barcelona.

Gallery profile

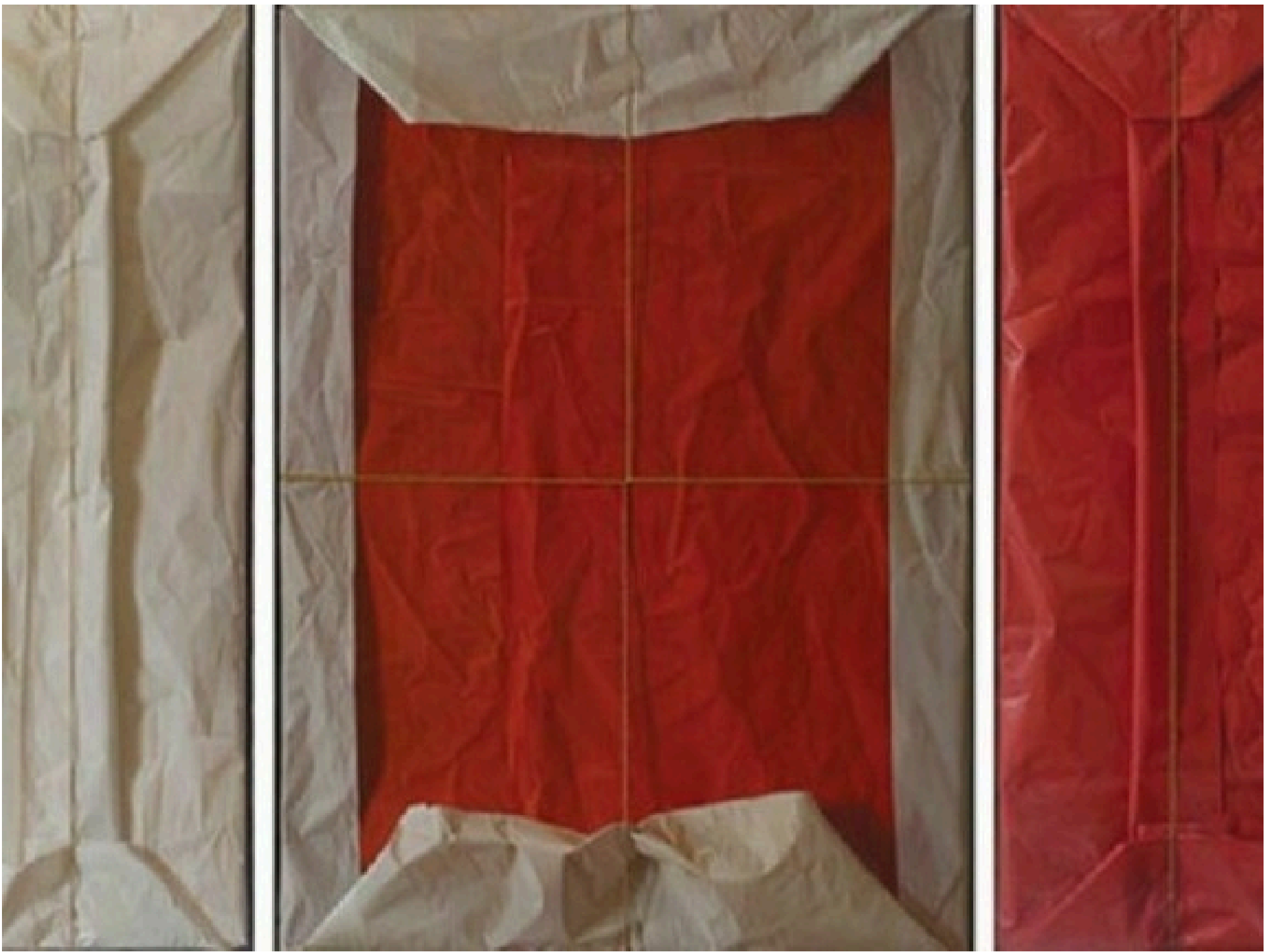
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