



# ABSTRACTION ATTRACTION

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NETWORKS

# COSTEL IARCA

His long dark hair is pulled back in a ponytail, and his romantic face is enhanced by designer eyewear. A cosmopolitan gentleman with a continental flair, his accent hints at his history, but he exudes the energy and ambition so often associated with America, and more specifically his adopted hometown of Chicago. Surrounded by a kaleidoscope of color, his multifaceted character lies within every intricacy of his work.

Costel Iarca's first exposure to art came when he was a small boy in the tiny country village of Valea, Romania. He noticed the paint on some crosses had worn off, so he made himself a brush from a squirrel's tail and repainted them. This was his earliest masterpiece, what he calls a "revelation from God." His first canvases were hunks of cardboard, and his colors were mixed from what nature provided.

By age thirteen, he was painting seriously. On his first exposure to the city, Iarca thought he would paint like Rembrandt and was quickly humbled. It's a lot harder than it looks. Though he believes ninety percent of an artist's ability is natural, he emphasizes the importance of formal instruction, which he received at the School of Popular Art in Targoviste, earning his B.A. in 1982. He considers Willem de Kooning and Jackson Pollock modern masters, along with graffiti artist Jean Michel Basquiat, but the more he studied, the more he admired Pablo Picasso.

"Picasso broke all the codes and all the laws. Picasso came and broke everything, and this way gave way to another form, another interpretation, through the geometrical forms, and another dimension to a painting," Iarca says. "This abstract is so different. They [Pi-

caso's paintings] look like art being photographed from the airplanes, like the geometrical landscape farms."

So as he began creating his own modern art, he too went against established norms and fell in love. Iarca is known for his patented, textured application method that gives the canvas three-dimensional

depth and definition. Discovered by accident, it involves layering or squeezing latex caulk onto the canvas to simulate fabric or other materials in abstract and representational artwork. Acrylic paint is applied over each layer.

Iarca developed his talent in a controlled, restricted environment. He suffered under Communist suppression during his formative years, where the police beat him for his political beliefs. With horror Iarca relates the days when a person couldn't speak freely because a neighbor could be an agent for the secret police with the power to arrest dissenters. He recalls listening to the Voice of America on the radio and watching American movies, dreaming of coming here.

"I loved America so much when I was a kid. I went to see a movie about the social life of the United States, and I was so fascinated when the people would walk barefoot on the university campus... when they would open the Coca-Cola," he remarks.

His dream came true. Now a U.S. citizen, he emigrated in 1994, leaving behind his parents, but gaining the freedom to live and create without fear. Initially, he taught developmentally disabled children and adults, but for the last seven years he had painted fulltime





and run his gallery on Chicago's Michigan Avenue.

larca states there is no "bottom line" in art. He believes a painting is always incomplete, and its incompleteness fascinates him, driving him to "reflect on the perfection and imperfection of the world and of the human soul."

larca believes that abstract expressionism is subject to interpretation, more powerful and more mysterious than realism. "It's very hard to interpret from abstract what was in the mind of the artist. No matter how many questions you ask, you cannot go as deep as an artist because sometimes it takes me six months to finish an abstract painting. Sometimes you start with a picture, and then you change so many times," he says. "Sometimes I overdo a painting, and I ruin a painting. Sometimes I paint over a painting if it stays in my studio for three years. I paint until a painting is sold. A painting is never perfect, never finished. Any time there are little things to add because we are imperfect. Physically and spiritually, we change all the time."

larca's first masterpiece - that small painted cross - has turned into a life-long dedication to the power of love and a representation of the unseen elements of the spirit. His fascination with the abstract expression of emotion within a technically innovative structure has allowed him to make his own mark on the art world.

