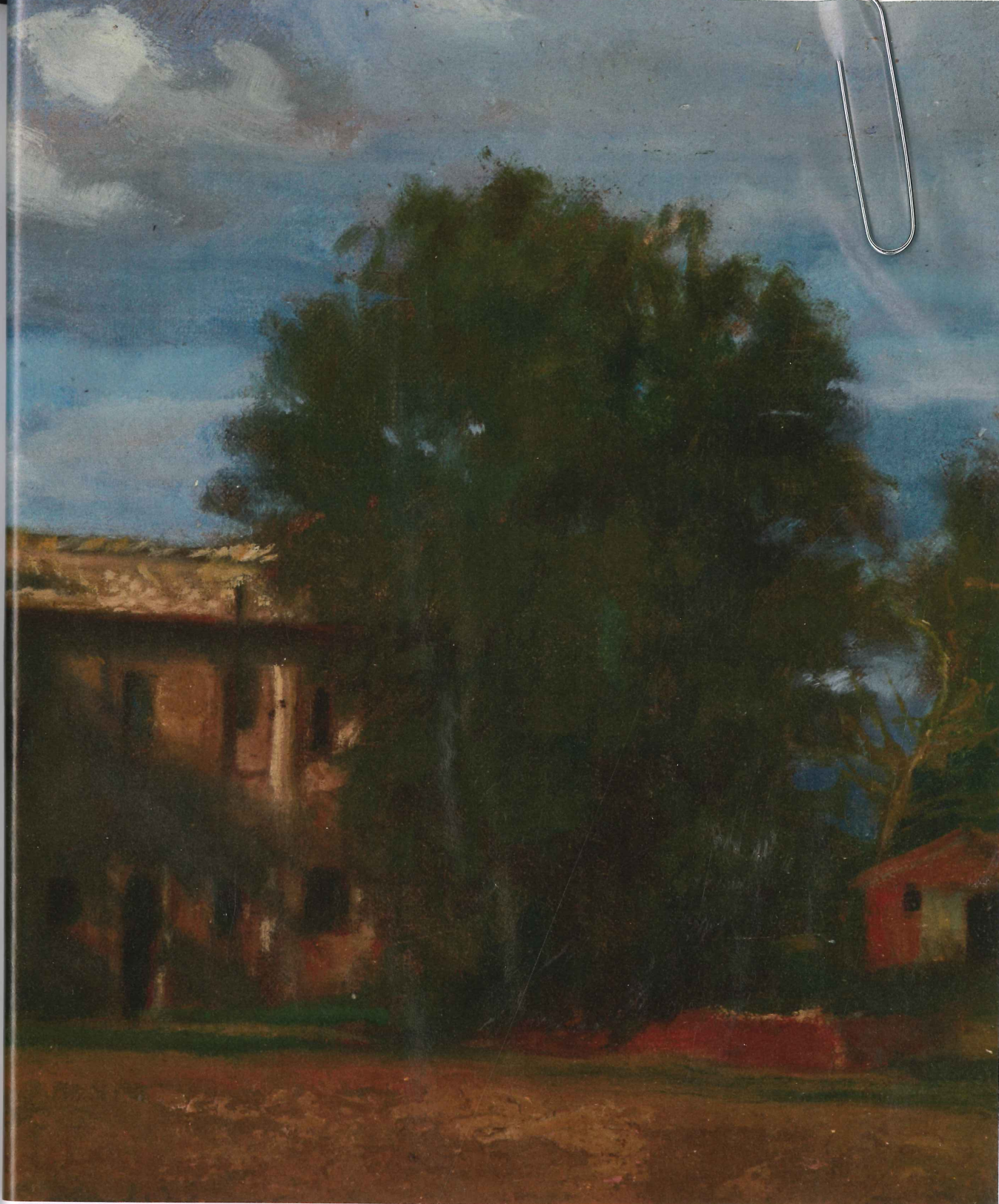




# The *LONG VIEW*





**Abandoned Villa**  
oil on linen, 14x20

Whether working as a wartime artist or creating Renaissance-style frescoes or painting portraits, figures and landscapes, **Benjamin F. Long IV** remains true to his aesthetic of natural realism.

by Daniel Grant



Undoubtedly, there are any number of reasons that someone might join the Marine Corps—patriotism, a desire to follow in the footsteps of a family member, the opportunity to learn a skill, the desire for adventure. Benjamin F. Long IV enlisted in 1967, at the height of the Vietnam War, in order to be a combat artist. He'd just finished college at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where he'd majored in creative writing. He knew his student deferment was now exhausted and felt sure that his number would come up in the draft lottery. A lot of draft-age young men were having What-do-I-do? conversations back then, and Long was one of them. At the time, he was taking drawing and painting classes at the Art Students League and had come to the belief that he was better suited to being a fine artist than a novelist. One of the people Long met at the League was Harry Jackson, who'd been a combat artist for the Marines during World War II. Jackson told Long that the Marines had kept the art program open. "That's how it sold me," says Long. "I said, 'Okay. Well, so I've got to get there right away to become a combat artist.'"

It didn't quite work out like that. For most of Long's two tours in Vietnam, he served in the infantry as a lieutenant.

It was only during his last few months there that the military leadership granted his wish. "I'd stayed by, re-upping to make sure that I could get into combat art because I'd already done all the things you could do as a lieutenant and then as a company commander," says Long. "So, they allowed me to do it. I think it only lasted about, maybe, five months, and then I was out of the Marine Corps."

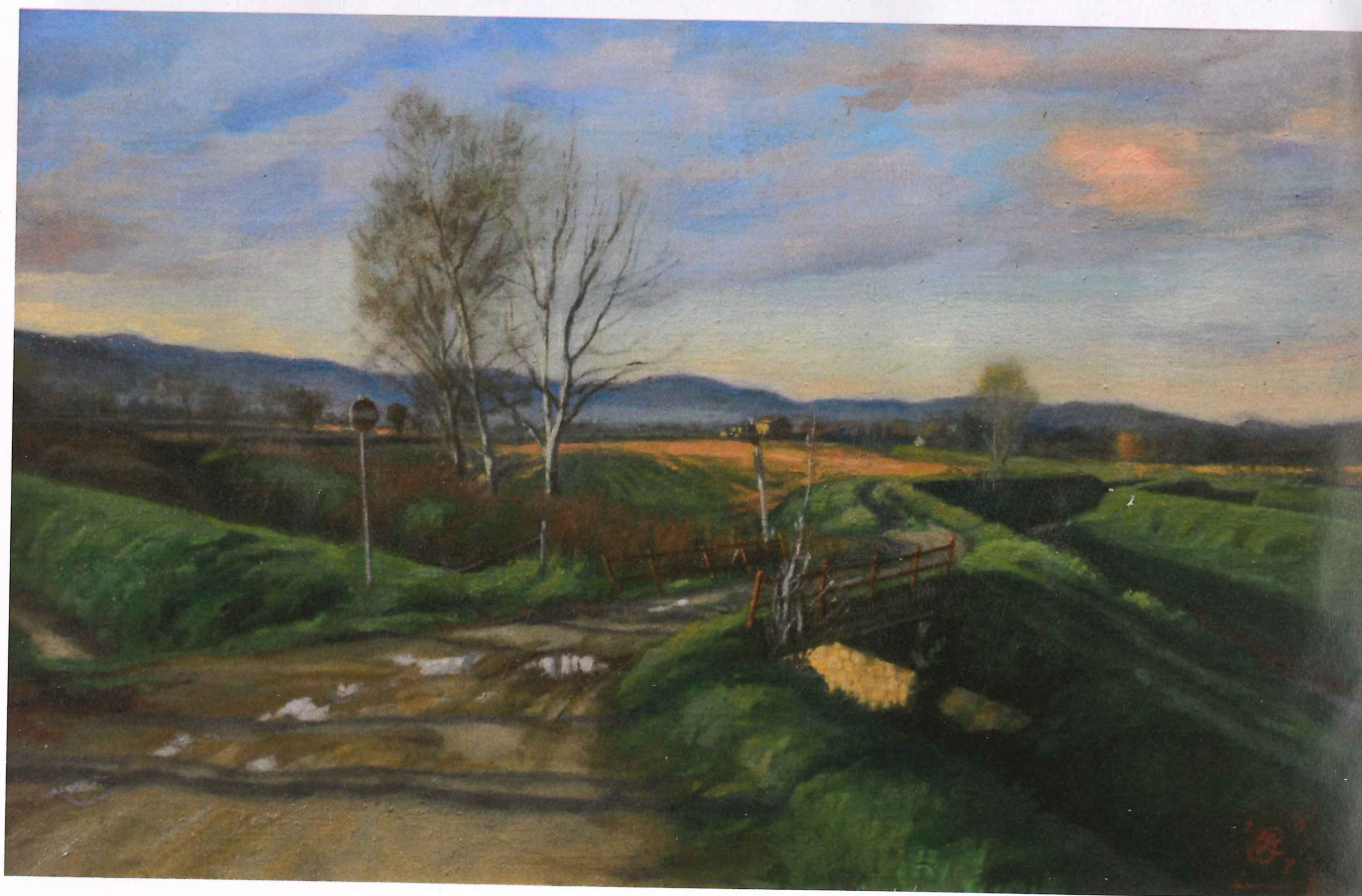
During that five-month period, Long led a team of four combat artists. The National Museum of the Marine Corps, in Triangle, Va., contains 50 works by Long, which include pieces done in ink, Conté crayon and watercolor (See Combat Art, opposite).

## RENAISSANCE SENSIBILITIES

As it happened, when Long left the military in 1970, a good friend, who at the time was a war correspondent for United Press International, asked the former Marine about his plans. "By that time I knew more about the Marine Corps than anything," Long says, "so he asked me where would I like to go next? I said that I'd seen a painting by this man named Pietro Annigoni [Italian; 1910–1988] that I really liked, and I thought it would be interesting to study with him, but I had no idea if he was still alive."

The benefit of knowing a journalist is that people in that profession tend

**Clear Cold  
Tuscan Day**  
oil on linen, 21x29





## COMBAT ART

In no way propaganda, Long's work includes portraits of individual soldiers relaxing (decompressing), evading sniper fire or helping a wounded serviceman. "These artists weren't given any specific instructions on what to do," says Joan Thomas, art curator at the National Museum of the Marine Corps, in Quantico, Va. "All they were told was, 'Go to war, do art.' There were no strictures."



CLOCKWISE  
FROM ABOVE  
**C-4 and Morning  
Coffee**  
ink and wash, 9x7

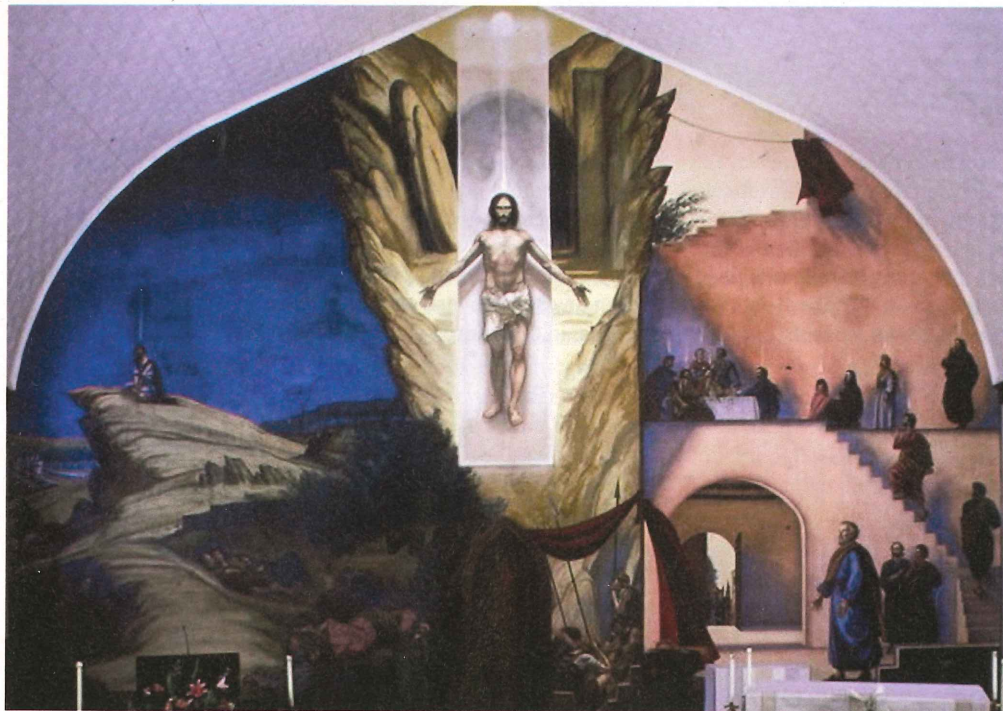
**A Marine Casualty**  
pen and ink wash,  
8½x10½

**Sniper in the  
Hedgerow**  
pencil, 9x12

ALL DRAWINGS: ART  
COLLECTION, NATIONAL  
MUSEUM OF THE MARINE  
CORPS, TRIANGLE, VA.







**LEFT**  
The fresco behind the main altar in **St. Peter's Catholic Church** (45x35 feet), in Charlotte, N.C., no longer exists, having fallen victim in 2002 to seismic shocks from underground construction in the neighborhood.

**BELOW**  
Charlotte, N.C.'s **Bank of America** is the home of a triptych fresco that Long designed and then created with a team of nine artists. Each panel measures 23x18 feet. The panel on the left represents the construction of the building (originally NationsBank Corporate Center). The theme of the middle panel is chaos/creativity. The intertwined nude figures in the sky set a counterpoint to the figures below, who wear the "costumes" of their work and social stations. The panel on the right represents mind/knowledge.





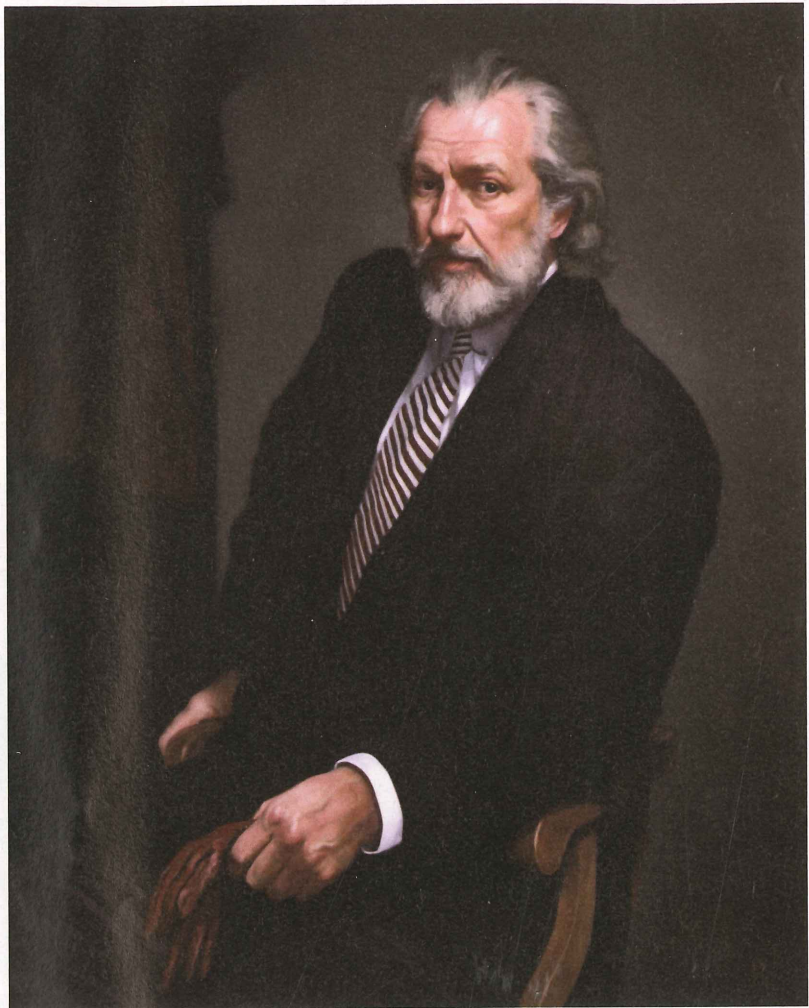
**Walker Wells**  
oil on linen, 54x47

to be good at finding out information, which was particularly useful during pre-internet times. The next day, the friend got back to Long with the information that Annigoni was quite alive and living in Florence, Italy. That city became Long's next stop.

For the next five years, Long apprenticed himself to Annigoni, learning how to paint frescoes using a process that dates back to the Renaissance. Then, in 1975, Long was awarded the inaugural Leonardo da Vinci International Art Award in painting, created by the Rotary Club of Florence as an annual prize for outstanding achievement by young people involved in the study of the sciences, technology, literature and the arts. At that point, the apprenticeship formally ended, although Long continued to reside in Italy and he worked off and on with Annigoni on fresco projects.

For the last 50 years, Long has lived as an expatriate, residing and working in Italy and France, creating frescoes as well as drawings and paintings of portraits, figures and landscapes. The artist does get back to the U.S. from time to time, and when on this side of the Atlantic, he works out of a studio in North Carolina., not far from where he grew up. He has created frescoes for a number of churches and office buildings in his native country, particularly in North Carolina (see St. Peter's Catholic Church and Bank of America, both at left) He also has paintings in the collections of the J. Paul Getty Museum and Harvard Business School.

Still, there's something about Italy of the 15th and 16th centuries that keeps Long going back to Europe. "When I got to Florence, that was it, a whole different world, and I just loved it. Everything was there," says Long. "Everything," that is, if what you really like is Renaissance art and architecture. That inclination was ingrained early, due to his grandfather, McKendree Robbins Long, a sometime painter and sometime Presbyterian minister who had studied at the Art Students League in the 1910s. "My granddad was a lover of van Dyck



**Female Figure Sitting in Contrapposto**  
Conté crayon on paper, 10x14



and Titian and artists like them, and from the time I was a small boy, he would talk to me about them," says Long.

## CLASSICAL INCLINATIONS

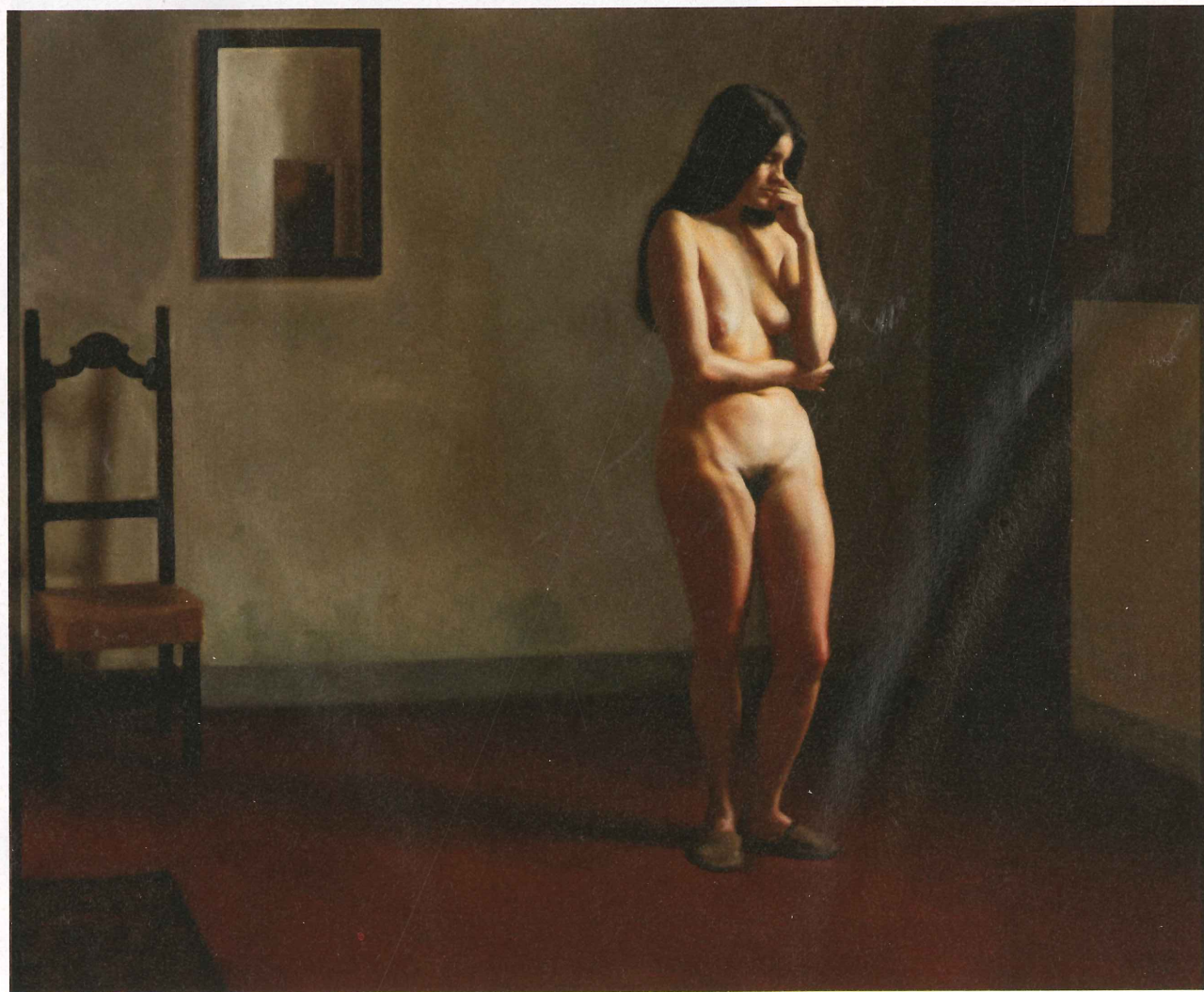
The 1970s art world wasn't a congenial atmosphere for classical realism or even painting, but the Art Students League provided a safe landing spot for Long, whose work has little in common with minimal, conceptual, process, video or installation art, which were all the rage in the galleries. He took classes at the League from Robert Beverly Hale, the first curator of contemporary American art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, who taught a course in art anatomy, and from Frank Herbert Mason, a painter whose portraits, figures and landscapes suggest the influence of William Merritt Chase. With these instructors and, later, with Annigoni, Long found a community of like-minded artists.

Although Long's figurative drawings bear a similarity to classical realism—a nude model in an iconic

pose—Long feels he would probably be considered more of a natural realist. He points out that he looks for models who are "a little more expressive, a little more inventive." His landscapes also tend to have a "classical" look, suggesting Italian vistas because of the types of trees and buildings depicted (see *Abandoned Villa*, pages 64–65).

Long has also frequently drawn or painted commissioned portraits (see *Walker Wells*, page 69). Unlike most portraitists, Long doesn't use photographs but does all his sketches and paintings in the sitter's presence, which has some obvious drawbacks. "One prominent political figure would sit for Long early in the morning. 'He'd go to sleep almost immediately,'" says Long, "so I'd have to keep up some kind of talk to help him stay awake." In another case, Long was painting the portrait of an old friend who had become president of a university. "But for as long as we've known each other," says Long, "he couldn't hold still. When we were 18, for example, he couldn't sit still." The constant fidgeting of the subject proved a challenge to Long as he strove to complete the painting.

**Slippers**  
oil on linen,  
32½x38½







Unlike much of today's representational art, in Long's work, one won't find satire, social commentary or imagery that requires lengthy explanation: In this artist's work, you see tightly drawn and painted images of people and things. Long found what he liked early on and stuck with it. "People who really love great art will always love great art. That's all there is to it," he says. At age 75, with a long career of doing what he likes best and finding an audience for that, Long doesn't feel much need to justify his life and work. "I just was lucky to have a couple of people over the years who liked the kind of painting I did," he says. ♡

*Daniel Grant has written six books on building a successful career as an artist, including The Business of Being an Artist (Allworth Press).*



Benjamin Long has completed 15 frescoes and, as part of a team led by Annigoni, is the only non-Italian artist to have done fresco work at Italy's Abbey of Monte Cassino, the first house of the Benedictine Order. He has exhibited work in the Royal Academy and the Royal Portrait Society, both in London. The Art Renewal Center includes his name on their list of Living Masters.

▶ VISIT LONG'S WEBSITE AT [BENLONGFINEART.COM](http://BENLONGFINEART.COM).