



**O**n a gloriously sunny day that holds the promise of spring, a lovely farmhouse beckons. Two dogs bound down the unpaved drive to sniff and welcome visitors; a cat stretches sleepily on the porch. There's a garden plot behind the house, where chickens are busy laying their day's quota of fresh eggs, and goats nibble at hardy tufts of grass. The door to an outbuilding opens. Stepping over its threshold, country pastimes are forgotten as you enter the atelier of artist Marc Chatov.

A mass of artwork rests at odd angles along baseboards, hanging on walls, sitting on easels, stacked on chests. Portraits in oils, studies in charcoal, drawings in conté crayon, from small intimate sketches to larger than life-size paintings, each celebrate the human form. A collection of pipes is displayed on a cupboard next to an assortment of helmets— one with wings. Oriental rugs, cushions and chairs, props, and tools all share space in this light-filled studio. How did this well-established Atlanta artist who specializes in portraiture end up in rural Morgan County? And why?

following his  
**bliss**

AT HOME WITH ARTIST MARC CHATOV

BY KAREN CONRADS WIBELL | PHOTOS BY TERRY ALLEN





Chatov is an anomaly: an artist who supports himself exclusively, and happily, through his talent. “I think our American culture promotes the myth that in order to be happy and earn a living, you can’t

pursue the arts,” Chatov says. “That might be correct to some extent, but I am a fan of Joseph Campbell, who said, ‘Follow your bliss.’ Tolstoy said, ‘Talent is love.’ If you love music, you make music. If you love painting, you paint.”

That may be so, but what provides the spark that differentiates the dilettante from the artist? Chatov’s immediate response: “The individual’s drive, his passion, is important, but so are environment, encouragement, and resources.” Marc was born with the first and received the other three from his teachers— both accomplished and respected painters— his father, Roman, and his uncle, Constantin.

The Chatov brothers, now deceased, were born in Rostov, Russia. Their father, a theatre impresario, filled their house with artists, actors, and musicians. Both boys studied at conservatories: Roman, art; Constantin, music. After the Russian Revolution and with the advent of communism, the family fled, bribing officials with gems sewn into the lining of their mother’s fur coat. Making their way first to Istanbul, then to Paris, they arrived in New York in 1922.

The brothers quickly became part of New York’s vibrant and stimulating art community. Constantin was a concert pianist and an accompanist for the Ballet Russe. Roman painted murals, one of his most notable for New York’s Russian Tea Room; designed costumes for the Ziegfeld Follies; and shared a studio with

The Chatovs’ open floor plan provides a wealth of wall space and functions as a gallery of Roman, Constantin, and Marc Chatov’s paintings.

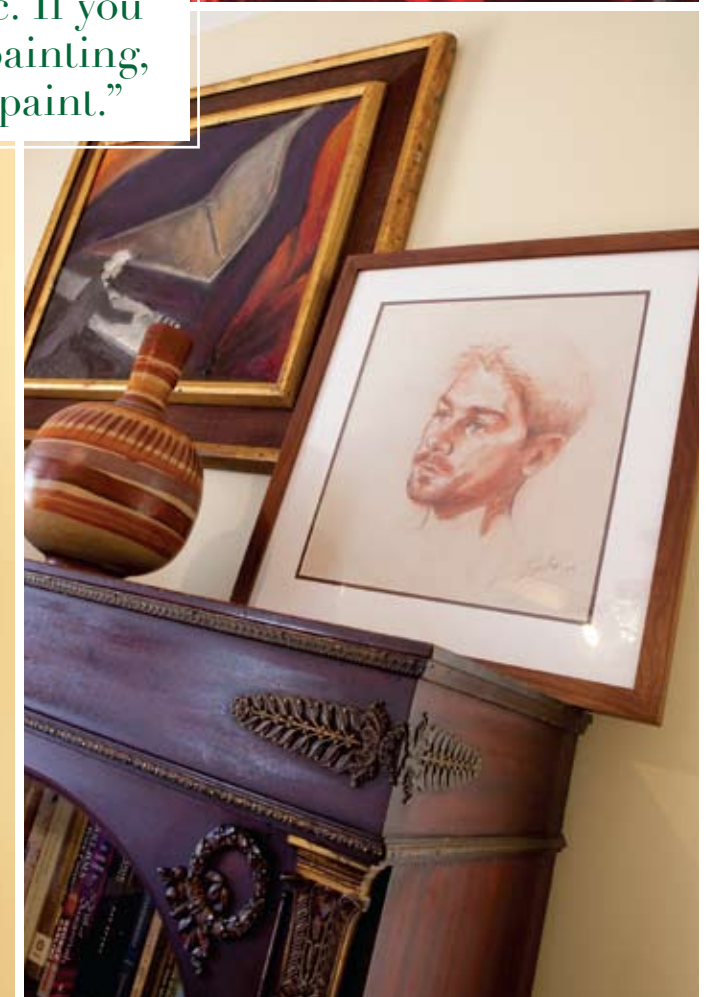
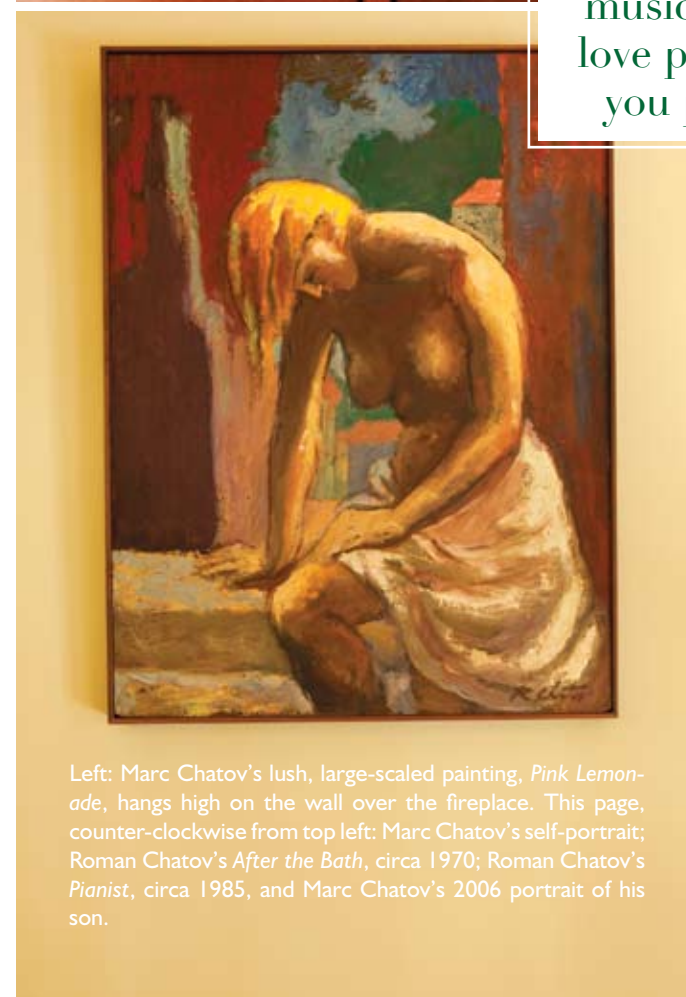
abstract expressionist, Willem de Kooning. He produced beautiful silkscreen scarves, one of which got caught in the spokes of an automobile tire, causing the tragic accident that killed dancer Isadora Duncan.

When Constantin injured his hand, his musical career ended. He gravitated to painting and became acclaimed for his figure studies and portraits. Roman, who had married Geneva McCormack, a beautiful and flamboyant model, also concentrated on portraits. A commission to paint a mural in time for the Cabana Hotel opening brought Roman to Atlanta, where both brothers settled in the early 1960s, living close enough to share a studio. MGM hired Constantin to paint portraits of Clark Gable and Vivian Leigh, and Roman stayed busy painting Atlanta’s elite.

“Marc was surrounded by art and classical music from the day he was born,” his wife, Gaye, explains. “He grew up with an exposure to European culture.” Chatov’s own philosophy was shaped by Roman and Constantin’s credos along with their classical training. As an artist, Marc innately seeks the beauty in life, but this is not limited to physical beauty. “There is a depth that is sought,” he remarks. “Within that depth there is beauty, whether it be the struggle of the heart, or people seeking freedom, or coping with tragedy. An artist could visit Haiti right now and feel and see the tragedy but produce very beautiful work.”



“If you love music, you make music. If you love painting, you paint.”



Left: Marc Chatov's lush, large-scaled painting, *Pink Lemonade*, hangs high on the wall over the fireplace. This page, counter-clockwise from top left: Marc Chatov's self-portrait; Roman Chatov's *After the Bath*, circa 1970; Roman Chatov's *Pianist*, circa 1985, and Marc Chatov's 2006 portrait of his son.



Clockwise from top right: *Harlequin Study* by Marc Chatov, 2006; *Twisters* by Roman Chatov, 1959; *la Musica* by Constantin Chatov, 1987

**a**

fter Chatov married Gaye in 2003, she changed careers to manage Chatov Studio, allowing her husband to focus solely on his painting and teaching. They decided to leave Atlanta to find a home that would better suit both their passions. “Marc loves hunting, fishing, and being outside, and I have always loved animals. The idea of being self-sufficient was also very appealing.” They had searched for eight months when a client suggested Morgan County, an area with which they were already familiar. Gaye spotted a property on the Internet: a house and outbuilding set behind a scrim of trees on ten acres of gently rolling land near Rutledge. It only took one look before they made an offer and moved in 2005.

Soaring walls and high windows were added to the studio, providing ample space for paintings. Working primarily in oils, Chatov limits commissioned portraits to four a year, allowing time for his own work and for teaching. “Portraiture is something I learned to do right away,” he says. “It is not easy, but it is something I was taught, and there was a big emphasis on getting it correct. I love the human face, so for me, a portrait is not a big stretch. The paintings I do for myself also focus on the human figure: faces and form and body language.” Influenced by the ideas of Carl Jung as well as Joseph Campbell, he finds that his work is evolving and dealing more subtly with archetypes. In his studio, two easels hold works in progress: one, a commissioned portrait, the other, a large-scaled piece for a gallery show at year’s end.

An excellent colorist with a strong knowledge of drawing and anatomy, Chatov is committed to understanding and studying his craft. Although he might change his brushwork style or experiment with different techniques and mediums, this painter is a realist. “He has pieces which are very finished and crisp,” Gaye points out. “And he has pieces which are very loose and juicy and splashy, but they are always in a realism genre.”

Their house’s open floor plan provides a wealth of wall space and functions as a gallery with its own permanent and revolving collections of Chatov family art. “Both Gaye and I feel a responsibility

to the legacy of work left by Roman and Constantin,” Chatov explains. “Their work has a strong presence in Atlanta society which needs to be stimulated and kept going.” Gaye has taken on the role of curator, cataloguing the Chatov brothers’ large body of artwork, researching provenance of the works which were sold, and documenting her husband’s own paintings.

Chatov’s favorite painting by his father is *Twisters*. Roman was a master of composition and, if you look carefully, you will discover that his son posed for him. *The Boat* by Constantin hangs nearby; its moody colors frame a small, beached boat with a gaping hole and is thought to be an evocative “self-portrait.” Front and center over the hearth is *Pink Lemonade*, Chatov’s lush large-scaled painting that features Gaye and friends at an outdoor café on a delightful summer afternoon.

Chatov started teaching early in his career, and he continues to instruct every Thursday at the Mendez Foundation art studio in Midtown Atlanta. Through his regular classes and out-of-town workshops, Chatov has learned, “I can’t teach [students] how to paint, but I can teach them how to see. Once you see, you can learn how to paint.” he says. “Uncle and Dad were very passionate about art, and I think they handed that to me... I believe you can’t keep what you don’t give away, and I have the privilege to pass on and instill some of that excitement to other people!”

Roman said that in art, first you become a master, then an artist, and finally a student. “This is where I think I am,” Chatov muses. Learning to be present in the moment and open to enlightenment, this intelligent, thoughtful, and talented artist continues to follow his bliss. “To me, painting hooks me into a greater source and connects me to the creative force,” he says. “I’ve always felt it’s like dancing on the eyelashes of God.”

*Karen Wibell is a freelance writer.*

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