





April Popko

The People's Painter: Bringing Energy, Purpose, and Light

By Leigh Woods

Upon meeting abstract artist April Popko for the first time, one is immediately drawn to her zestful personality, infectious positivity, and heartwarming kindness. Her effervescent spirit continues into her home studio, where many paintings exhibit vibrant colours and an energy that easily transfers from piece to person.

Born in the United States, but with Polish roots, April moved to Prague in the early 2000s, where she now lives with her husband and three children. While she is a respected and well-established artist today, she didn't have an easy beginning to her career here in the Czech Republic. When starting out, even her apartment walls were completely bare: "When I got to Prague, I had nothing on my walls. I had no paint, no canvas and no clue as to where I'd get it, so I just painted on scrap wood, cardboard, old pieces of kitchen countertops, whatever I could find and I used paint that my mom mailed to me."

To overcome her initial struggle breaking into Prague's competitive art scene, April realized she needed to become more active within the community. She finally got her well-deserved break in an unexpected fashion. "I organized a neighborhood charity garage sale to raise money for MOTO Hospital, in thanks for helping my children during a very difficult time. It was during the fundraiser that an architect bought one of my paintings. At the same time, she commissioned me to make the biggest piece I had ever been asked to do." Thanks to a little help from her friends, she was

able to acquire the necessary materials to begin working on the project, and that was the point at which her career really took off. It would seem that by expressing gratitude and giving something back to the universe, April was duly rewarded. Her charity work continues to this day, with regular artwork donations helping to raise money for good causes.

When asked to describe her work in three words, the April uses "energy, light, and connection," and says that her goal is to transfer her own positive energy to the observer through her paintings. It is clear that she takes great pride in her art spreading good throughout the world and she believes everything has a ripple effect. "I want my audience to experience positive emotions. I want them to feel that the studio is a safe place to explore art and to feel energy, purpose, and light. I want them to walk away with a painting that will bring optimism and good energy to their homes and spaces."

And it is not just through her own art that she hopes to achieve her goal. April also runs workshops for adults and children with the aim of inspiring them to create their own masterpieces, consequently spreading good vibes across the globe. "People love my workshops because they serve as an outlet from everyday life and we have so much fun." The workspace offers an atmosphere where students can feel both relaxed and inspired, two vital elements for reaching their maximum creative potential.



April also paints from her summer studio in Cape Cod, Massachusetts, where she takes great inspiration from soaking up the fresh, salty air by the Atlantic Ocean, seeing the crisp light reflected off the sand dunes, and hearing the soft seagrass swaying in the wind. One of her most recent collections, titled "Between Two Worlds," is inspired by the two places she calls home. The collection depicts her affection for both Prague and North Truro, in addition to her desire to keep the connection between them.

However, longing to be with relatives on both sides of the pond has led to mixed emotions about her chosen lifestyle, which she pours into her artwork. "My heart is in both places at all times. I can never really fully be in one place – this is very inspiring to me because a lot of emotion comes from feeling torn and wanting to connect it. Many of my paintings represent connecting two things – this comes from me wanting to stay connected, wanting communication to stay healthy and wanting to express myself in unfamiliar territory."

Ask any visual artist where they get their inspiration and they'll often credit famous names like Pollock, Picasso, or O'Keeffe. But when asked which person has inspired her the most, April pays tribute to her family, answering, "My dad. He's my greatest inspiration. I miss his ideas, his advice, his unique perspective on the world. I miss his optimism, his laughter, and I miss being around his energy, even though I know that incredible energy lives on inside of me."

If I could have a cocktail with him now, we'd definitely talk 'ideas' right after a Polish 'Na zdrowie!'" April has chosen to showcase a piece called "Dreamboat" from her "Fleet" collection as this edition's featured artwork. The enormous series is comprised mostly of paintings of sailboats, one of her favourite subjects, because she views them as a symbolic means of transportation to reach her friends and family back home in the US.

Further, April says that people gravitate toward the sailboats and the messages they represent. "The sailboat has become a sort of iconic image from my studio. It represents pure potential, forward motion, adventure, skill, determination, hope, optimism – a journey. As I have heard, a skillful sailor never learned in calm seas and so the sailboat also represents that no matter what storm you go through, it makes you stronger and more resilient."

In a chaotic world full of selfishness and greed, we can be inspired by April not just as a phenomenal artist, but as a compassionate and benevolent human being. It would be easy for someone blessed with her talents to focus solely on personal gain, but instead, she wields her paintbrush to support those in need while spreading messages of hope, peace, and love through her work. While most deem science, law, and education the most important professions for future development, April is a testament to the important role of creatives in making this complicated world a better place.

Photos by April Popko