

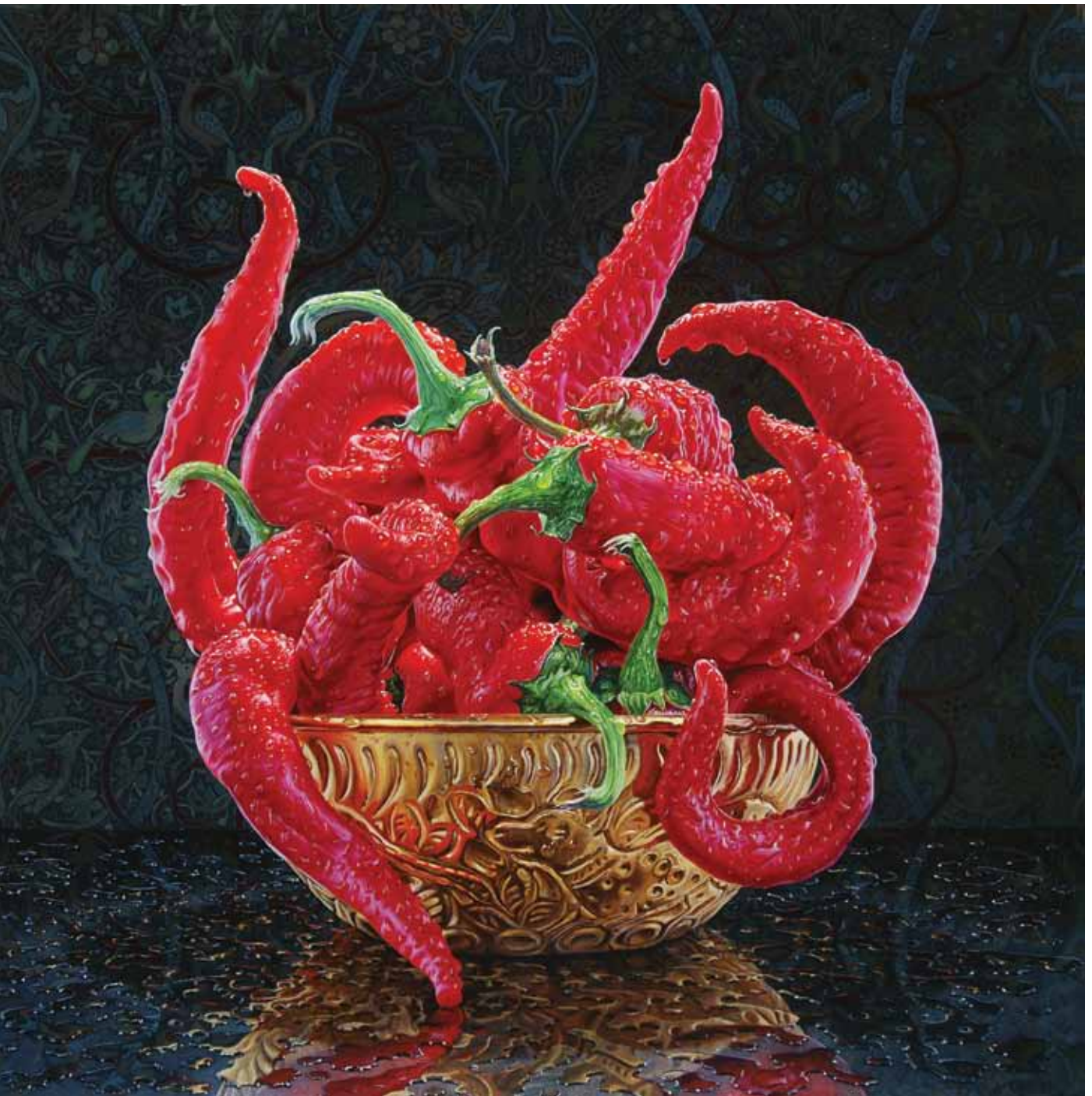
Eric Wert More Is More

OPPOSITE: *Mola Salsa* (oil on panel, 24x24)

BELOW: *Capsicum* (oil on panel, 16x16)

Eric Wert (www.werteric.com) puts in 14-hour days, peering inches away from the panel that's placed on an adjustable easel mounted to the studio wall. Consulting both the actual set up and an archive of high-resolution photos shot

from many points of view and projected on the computer screen, Wert pursues not the illusion of reality but rather an almost hallucinatory vision consistent with a heightened state of perception.





MATERIALS

Surface: MDO (medium density overlaid plywood panels for paintings up to 30x40; canvas for larger paintings)

Oils: Gamblin, Williamsburg, Old Holland

Brushes: Daler-Rowney

Glazing mediums: one part damar, one part stand oil, five parts turpentine

INFLUENCES

Rachel Ruysch (Dutch, 1664-1750)

Jan Davidsz. de Heem (Dutch, 1606-1684)

Otto Marsais van Schrieck (Dutch, circa 1619-1678)

Abraham Mignon (Dutch, 1640-1679)

Saturated, the colors are pushed toward an extreme uniformity, not prevalent in nature. By exaggerating, embellishing and multiplying (for example, water drops) what he sees, the artist injects movement into the stillness of the still life genre. “I want the paintings to provide an active rather than passive viewing experience,” Wert says. “The upended subjects, complex background fabrics, and distorted

reflections are all intended to add a dynamism and complexity, to create a space in which the viewer can be lost.”

“The joy for me is looking intensely.”

Wert studied at the Art Institute of Chicago, where he focused on drawing. His first job was as a draftsman, a scientific illustrator who had to imagine how anthropological artifacts were once used. He thus had to concoct what he couldn’t see or research,

which is comparable to his methodology today.

How does he manage both to imagine and see so much and so well? “The joy for me is looking intensely,” he says. “I don’t use a magnifying lens. When possible, I like to hold the subjects (not objects!) in my hand while painting them, to really understand the tactile quality.”

His goal for *Heirlooms* (see page xx), *Mola Salsa* and *Capsicum* was “to paint subjects that were both luscious and visceral—and could be understood both ways.” Indeed, the palpable nature of the fruit’s or vegetable’s flesh evokes the viscus, internal organs like the heart. Take a look at that menacing knife, posed to eviscerate the tomato, for instance, in *Mola Salsa*! As such, these pictures allude to but deviate from the vanitas tradition, predicated on the fleeing nature of beauty, life and fame. “While my technique is precise,” the artist says, “the paintings are meditations on the impossibility of control over nature—human and otherwise.”