

# TIBOR DE NAGY

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David Ambrose, January 2026

“Rust Never Weeps” is my attempt to acknowledge the major contribution to my growth as an artist by two of the strongest willed people I have ever known, my paternal grandmother, Santa Imbrosci, and my mother, Angela Ambrose. In every way, their contributions were major factors in the exhibition you see before you.

My family immigrated to America from Sicily and Italy in the early twentieth century. Their path to America was guided like a thread through the eye of a needle as both of my sets of grandparents included dress designers, tailors and seamstresses.

In fact, the very first “art studio” I ever stepped foot in as a five-year-old was my paternal grandmother’s sewing room. She was a gifted dress designer from Messina, Sicily, a region known for its rich history of fashion design and tailoring. She brought that tradition to Bound Brook, New Jersey, where she established her business in her family’s house. Her sewing room, nestled behind French doors, was quite literally the largest room in the house. It doubled as both office and workspace and was bathed in northern light that illuminated the dress patterns, bolts of fabric and spools of thread as if they were preliminary sketches, rolls of canvas and tubes of paint.

In 1980, my grandmother passed away leaving me a modest inheritance. She had always wanted me to see the old country — *la madrepatria*. At the time, I was a sophomore at Muhlenberg College in Allentown, Pennsylvania, where I was an art history major who had fallen in love with the Italian Renaissance. So, instead of spending that inheritance on a new car or clothes, I asked my department head, Dr. Ellen Callmann, if I could enroll in an immersive summer program in Perugia, Italy for credits towards my degree. She was enthusiastic about the idea.

Perugia was an Umbrian hill town founded by the Etruscans some 2,700 years ago. Along with a clutch of spiral bound notebooks, I packed a block of watercolor paper, some pencils, and box of watercolors to artistically document the trip. My aptitude for art was growing, but a pathway to an art career seemed elusive to me. Little did I know that trip would lead me to my true vocation. I had traveled to Europe to become an art historian, but I had returned as an artist; the early watercolors

offering a bridge to my life's work as a painter. Perhaps my grandmother had even sensed that?

Some eight years after that fateful trip, I began a series of *Black Trunk Paintings* based on a rusted steamer trunk nestled in a corner of my studio above a shoe store in Bound Brook, New Jersey. How that trunk had followed me there escapes me, but its presence haunted my sketch books for over a year. What I had failed to realize was that black metal trunk was the very same trunk my grandparents had immigrated from Sicily with over a hundred years ago; an unintended homage to my grandparents through a connection to "their other vessel"; a container of their worldly possessions and above all, hope.

The second woman to play a major role in my childhood was my mother, Angela Ambrose, (nee Lubrano). My mother was the *materfamilias* of our household who shepherded me through the most difficult times of my adolescence. Whether she was encouraging my drawing while I convalesced at home from major surgery to remove a bone tumor from my right leg at age six years-old or sheltering me from neighborhood bullies who harassed me once I returned to school, my mother cloaked me in her maternal wings. But that surgery had also proved to be a reminder of my own fragile mortality.

"Aunt Angie's" authority extended to every corner of our family. She was streetwise and tough with a piercing stare that could melt any wall of untruths thrust her way. Her toughness had always been something I wished possessed more of. And perhaps, my recent health battles have shown me that maybe, just maybe, I possess more of her toughness than I had ever realized.