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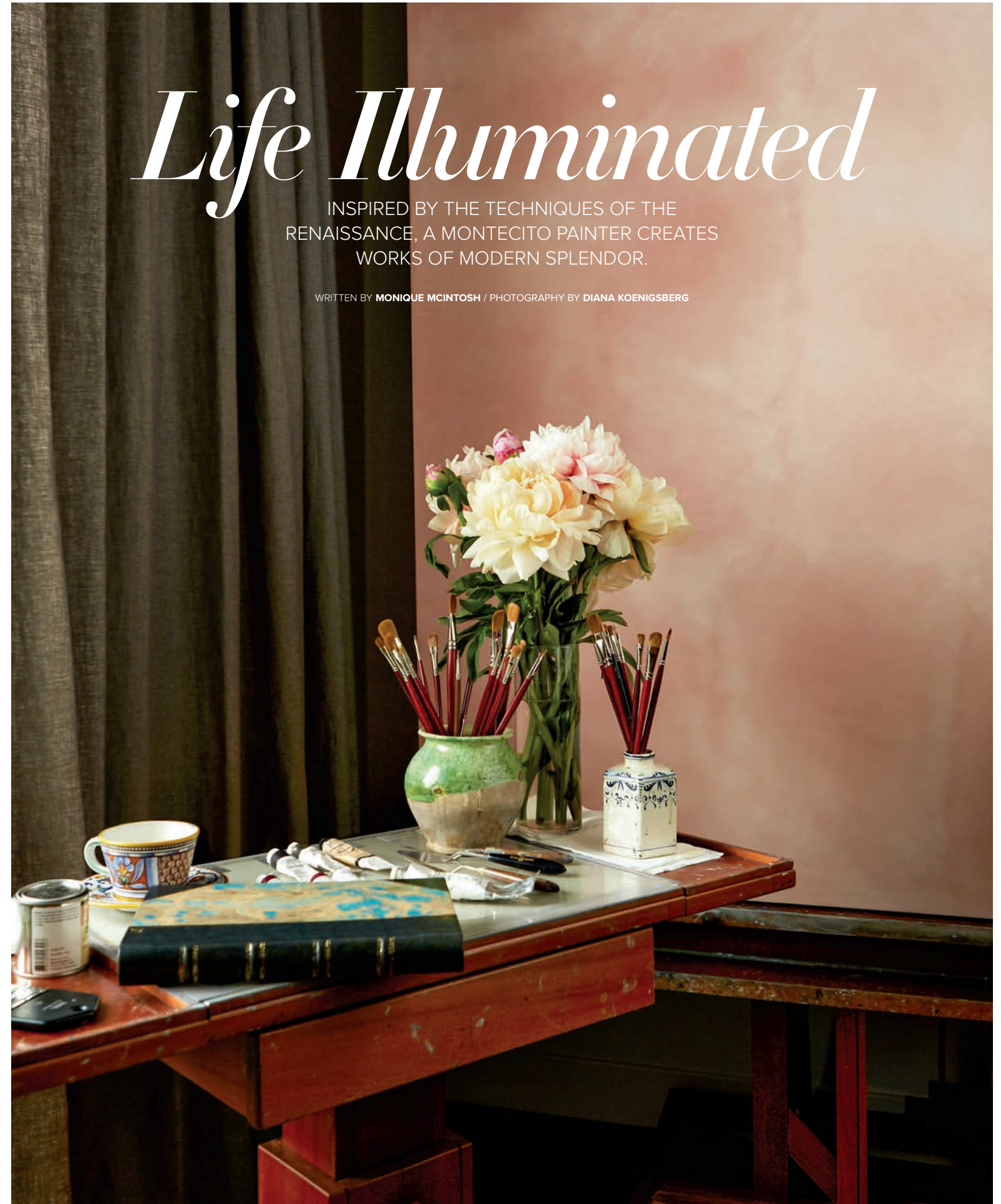




# *Life Illuminated*

INSPIRED BY THE TECHNIQUES OF THE  
RENAISSANCE, A MONTECITO PAINTER CREATES  
WORKS OF MODERN SPLENDOR.

WRITTEN BY **MONIQUE MCINTOSH** / PHOTOGRAPHY BY **DIANA KOENIGSBERG**








No matter how far removed from our technology-driven lives, the saints and nymphs of Renaissance masterworks still resonate with startling realism, seemingly bursting out of their frames. The sublime spirit of that era lives on in the work of Montecito-based artist Carin Gerard. Instead of heralding angels, the painter uses the period's intricate techniques to capture the hidden grandeur of temporal, everyday things. "I want to take natural subject matter and bring it dramatically and graphically to life," says the artist.

Gerard first discovered her passion for Renaissance art while in Europe after college when she became transfixed by old-master paintings. Their full-fleshed depth left an impression on her as a young artist. "The deep light and dark, that kind of drama really affected me," she recalls. "I loved their perspective, how they brought the viewer in." Enamored by the style, Gerard joined the Charles H. Cecil Studios in Florence, Italy, to study classical realist painting. The experience "changed my life," she says.

Focusing on still life, she delved deeply into the genre. Of late, however, the artist has begun to explore a more modern approach to her work. "I made a conscious effort to start thinking in a more contemporary way," says Gerard. Her new method involves zooming in on still life subjects so they breach the boundaries of her massive canvases while enlarging and exaggerating every detail.

Gerard's references remain rooted in reality; she photographs blooms from her gardens and butterfly specimens. For her *Thin Air* series, she uses snapshots of the sky taken on her annual pilgrimages back to Italy. But the artist departs from her inspirations' natural hues, creating her own expressive color harmonies. The result: immense roses and peonies that seem carved from marble, and gauzy butterflies that appear too fragile to touch. The aim, she says, is paintings "that make you feel entwined, like you can step into the image and become a part of it."

Despite Gerard's modern slant, her technique remains entrenched in the Renaissance tradition, beginning with her hand-ground pigments. Over her traced compositions, she applies fine washes of color and wipes away sections to highlight in white. These then blur with shadows to create a grisaille—the monochrome underpainting used by old masters to yield a three-dimensional effect. Over days, she layers translucent glazes of color, carefully calibrating each hue by value, which she records in journals.

"They are like a bible to me," Gerard says of these notebooks. The diaries are themselves beautiful objects and a reminder that even the smallest moments of beauty deserve reverence. "I'm just trying to capture that one moment," she notes. "We are in constant change and motion, and my intent is to hold that thought and slow down enough to appreciate all that we have." 



Artist Carin Gerard's meticulously organized Montecito studio is filled with the paints and pigments (opposite) she uses to realize her paintings, including those of flowers (left). Shelving contains art books and the journals where she makes detailed notes about her work. Shown below are a collection of butterflies used for inspiration and more notebooks.

