

WORKING

Ardenia Capanelli

Magically making what is old seem new

SHE IS

Giving 600-year-olds face lifts

MAKING A DREAM COME TRUE

Ardenia Capanelli has the gift of an artistic eye and a detailed hand. With each stroke, she adds life and color to the canvas.

But the work she does is not her own; it is usually that of an artist who lived hundreds of years ago.

Capanelli, 42, has combined her love for old paintings with her natural ability to create her own dream job in art restoration.

She was formally trained in art restoration in her native Italy, taking an intensive three-year course at an art school. She is an expert in Renaissance paintings.

"Where I am from, it is a common profession, but here hardly anyone seems to know about it," she said, remnants of her homeland apparent in her slight Italian accent.

A COMBINATION OF ART AND SCIENCE

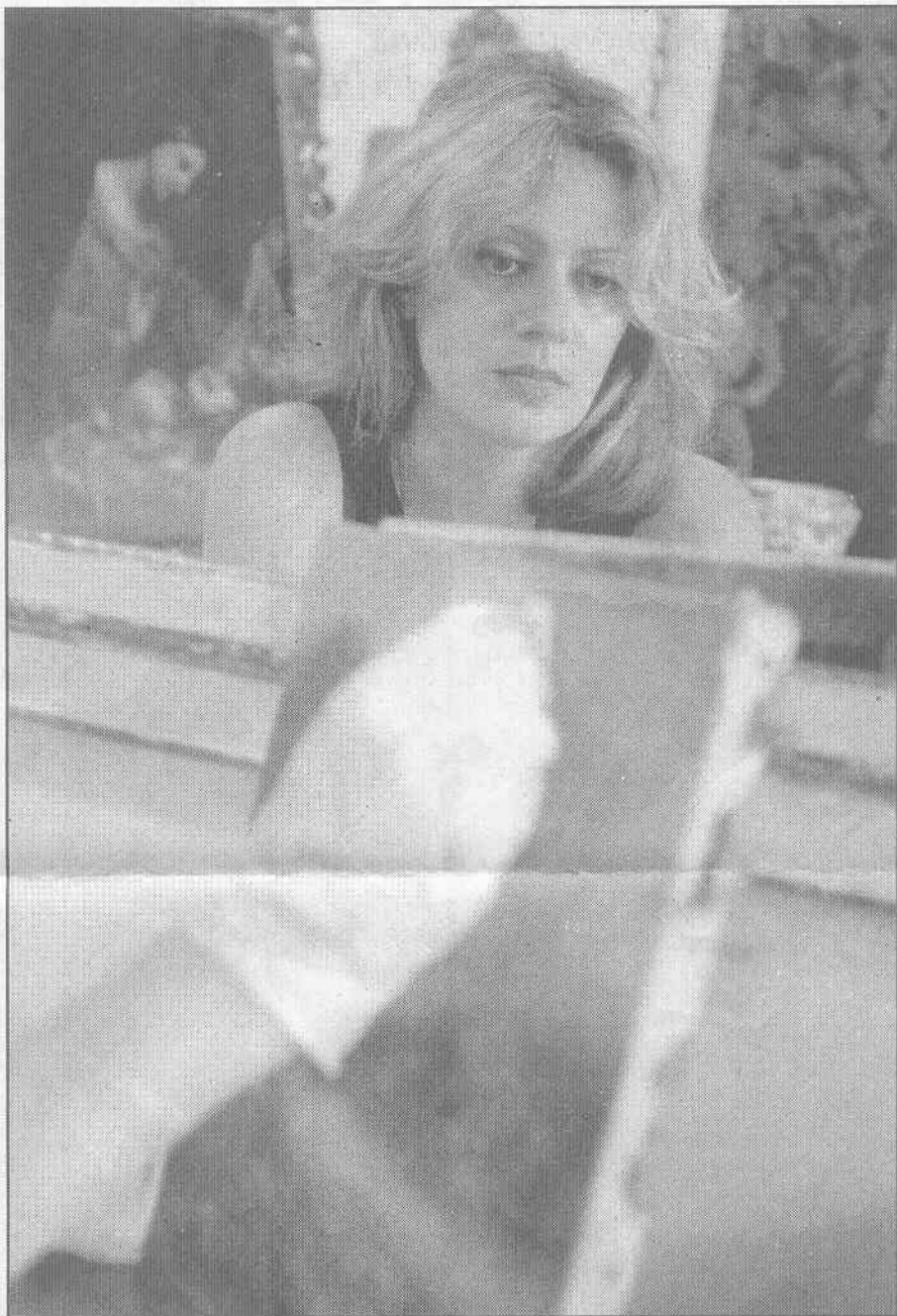
Eleven years ago, she brought her Italian-bred profession to the United States and opened her own business in Newport Beach.

To do her job correctly, Capanelli must be light with her hands and sensitive to colors. She must know how to add a hand or a flower here or brighten up a color there without drawing any attention to the new work.

She not only has to know how to mix colors and solvents to match exactly, but she must be able to paint as well as the original artist to make the entire picture blend.

"I am artistic. I just don't want to be an artist," she said. "I want to use my talents and appreciation for art to provide a service."

With painstaking precision and accuracy, Capanelli applies solvent to the painting to remove centuries of varnish



and dirt, she said. Each painting has its own damage, and each damage has its own remedy. It takes a true professional to know the difference, she said.

To mix the solvents correctly, Capanelli must also be familiar with chemistry.

PRESERVING FAMILY HEIRLOOMS

The service she provides allows for pieces of art to stay vibrant and youthful despite their actual age.

Her customers often have tears in their eyes when they see how drastically Capanelli transforms a faded, torn or damaged painting. Many times, the pieces have been handed down for generations, she said. Over

the years, they have been abused, forgotten or touched up unprofessionally.

Although Capanelli specializes in Renaissance paintings, a lack of 600-year-old paintings in the Newport-Mesa area prompted her to branch out into other areas, she said. In addition to restoring paintings, she resurrects porcelain and pottery that have been smashed into pieces.

"It sounds more difficult than it is," she said. "When you love it, it's just a pleasure and is actually very relaxing . . . almost therapeutic."

— Story by Lolita Harper, photo by Greg Fry