

Movement

THE LANGUAGE OF

PASCAL BENICHOUS
POETIC ABSTRACTIONS

BY FRED BOLLACI



There

is movement in the work of Pascal Benichou, even when the canvas itself stands perfectly still.

It exists in the sweep of a palette knife, in richly layered oil paint, and in the tension between restraint and release. His paintings seem to breathe. They pulse. They invite the viewer not simply to observe, but to feel, linger, and respond.

From May through November 2026, Sarasota's Art Ovation Hotel welcomes Pascal Benichou as its featured exhibiting artist, continuing the hotel's evolution into one of Florida's most vibrant intersections of hospitality, contemporary culture, and visual art.

For regular readers of VENÜ, Art Ovation has become far more than a luxury hotel. It has evolved into a true cultural gathering place, where art openings feel like intimate salons, collectors mingle with creatives and travelers, and Sarasota's increasingly sophisticated arts scene finds one of its most dynamic homes.

Benichou's exhibition, *Places and Landscapes*, feels particularly suited to both the venue and the moment.

The work is atmospheric yet physical. Emotional yet disciplined. Abstract, but never detached. Much like Sarasota itself, it exists somewhere between elegance and freedom, polish and spontaneity.

Born and raised in Provence, France, Benichou grew up surrounded by painters and artists, in a family where beauty, form, and creative expression were woven naturally into daily life. That early immersion in art laid the foundation for a lifelong exploration of movement, sensation, and visual language.

Yet painting was not his first great artistic medium.

His creative voice fully flourished in New York, where he embarked upon an acclaimed

twenty-year career as a ballet dancer, performing with the Metropolitan Opera, Chicago City Ballet, San Francisco Ballet, and the Joffrey Ballet. He also appeared as a guest artist with the New York City Opera and the Erick Hawkins Dance Company, developing a reputation for emotional depth, physical precision, and extraordinary originality.

Critics took notice.

The New York Times praised his "innate blend of innocence and sophistication," while *Backstage* highlighted his "startling originality."

In 1998, Benichou was selected as the sole male dancer chosen to perform in the Olympic Opening Ceremonies in Nagano, Japan, an extraordinary distinction in an already remarkable performing career.

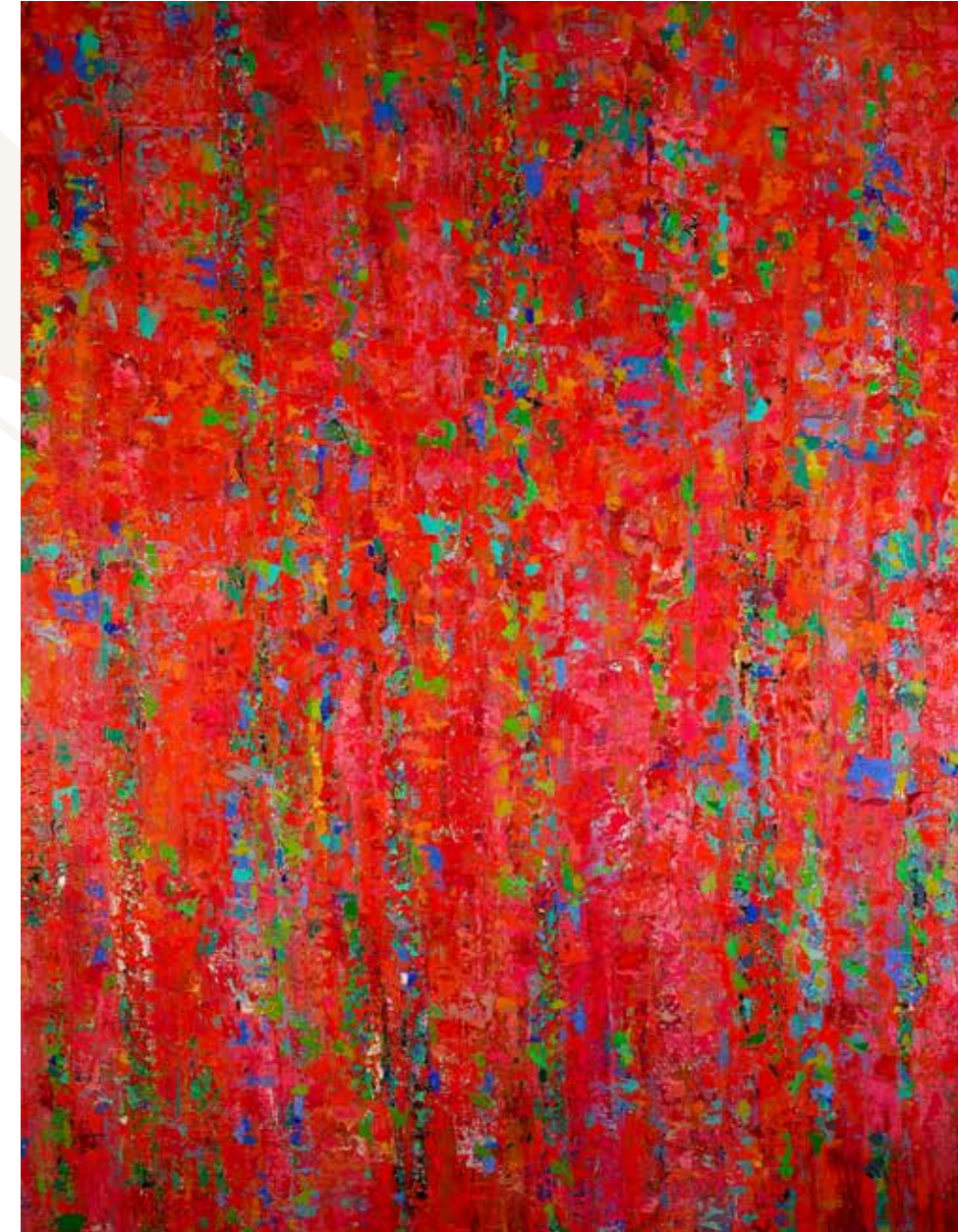
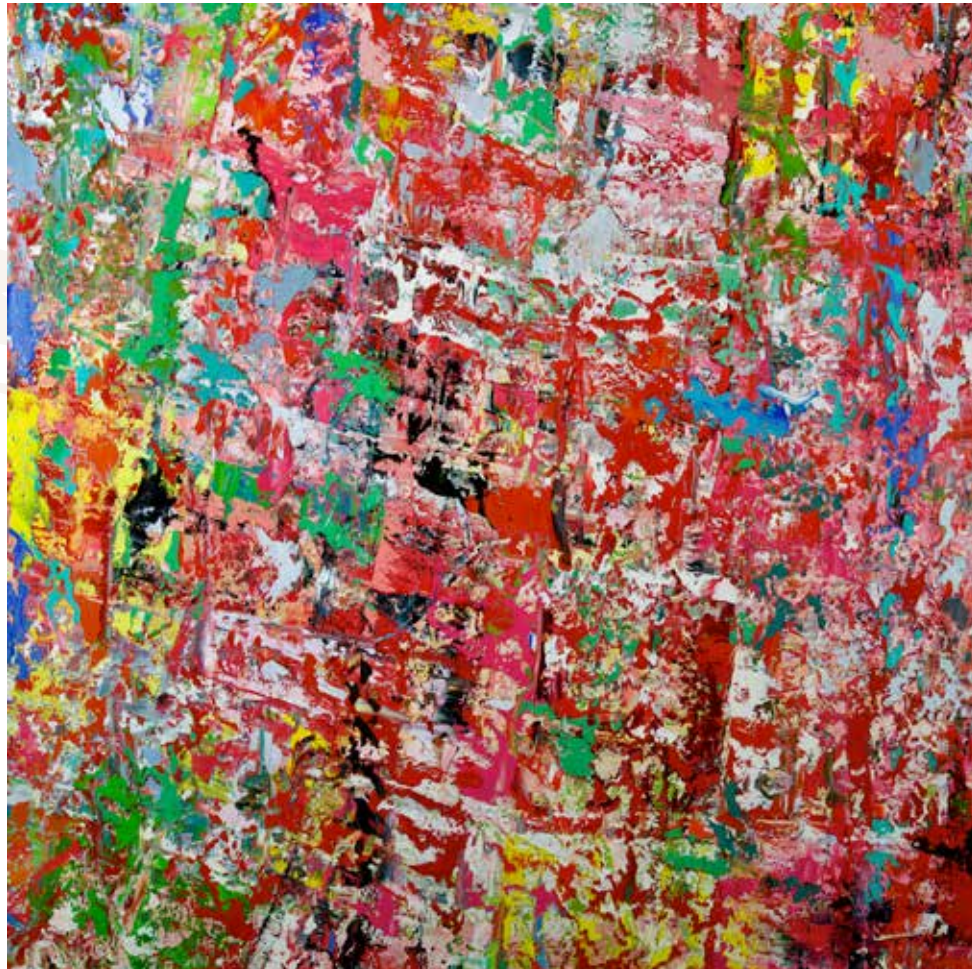
Perhaps most revealing, however, was his collaboration with composer, poet, and choreographer Lucia Dlugoszewski, with

whom he created the one-hour solo work *Taking Time to Be Vulnerable*, performed in New York City. The title itself feels almost prophetic when viewed through the lens of his later visual art.

Vulnerability, along with improvisation, intuition, and emotional immediacy, remains central to everything Pascal Benichou creates.

That background matters deeply when approaching his paintings.

Benichou does not paint like a traditional landscape artist. Nor does he approach abstraction in the coldly conceptual manner that can sometimes distance viewers from contemporary work. His paintings are deeply corporeal. You sense the body behind them. The motion. The instinct. The improvisation. The accumulated discipline of a lifetime spent understanding how gesture can communicate what words cannot.



One quickly realizes these are works created not only by a painter, but by a performer, someone profoundly attuned to rhythm, tension, spatial awareness, and emotional cadence.

In transitioning from dance to painting, Benichou has effectively extended his embodied artistic language onto canvas.

His work captures what he describes as the instinctive interplay of form, color, sensation, and subconscious impulse. Using palette knives and spatulas rather than delicate brushwork, he builds sculptural depth in oil paint, creating surfaces that feel tactile, alive, and in constant dialogue with light and space.

Like the great Action Painters of the 1950s, the act of creation itself becomes inseparable from the finished work.

Yet unlike some abstract expressionists whose work can feel emotionally distant or intentionally intellectualized, Benichou's paintings remain deeply human and accessible. They invite emotion first, analysis second, allowing the viewer's own memories and associations to become part of the encounter.

The paintings absorb and reflect light differently throughout the day. Thick layers of oil create shifting atmospheres as viewers move around them. Certain passages seem almost geological in texture; others dissolve into vaporous washes of color and sensation. The surfaces reward close looking, yet they also retain their impact from across a room.

There are echoes of movement everywhere.

And perhaps that is precisely the point.

His exhibition, *Places and Landscapes*, moves beyond literal representation and instead explores what might be called emotional geography: internal landscapes rendered through texture, color, rhythm, and presence rather than strict realism.

The exhibition is described as "an exploration of abstraction inspired by the fundamental composition of nature," where viewers are invited into "a world of color, form, and sensation, where personal interpretation



boutique luxury hotel, gallery, social hub, and creative incubator. Its rotating exhibitions, artist receptions, live performances, and commitment to contemporary culture have helped elevate Sarasota's profile as a serious arts destination, complementing the city's internationally respected ballet, opera, theater, and visual arts institutions.

Increasingly, Sarasota feels like a city coming fully into its own culturally.

Benichou's work fits seamlessly into that evolution.

Like Sarasota, his art balances sophistication with warmth and refinement with spontaneity. It feels cultured, but never inaccessible; elegant, but never overly controlled.

There is also something distinctly cinematic about the way his paintings interact with Florida light. Morning sun reveals subtleties that evening shadows partially conceal. Much like the Gulf Coast itself, the mood shifts constantly, changing with the hour and with the viewer's position.

While abstraction can sometimes intimidate viewers unfamiliar with contemporary art, Benichou's work remains unusually approachable on an emotional level. There is warmth

nature becomes less a physical destination and more an emotional memory, something sensed rather than specifically seen.

Horizons dissolve. Forms emerge and recede. Color drifts, collides, and reorganizes itself in ways that feel simultaneously spontaneous and intentional. Each canvas appears to hold a moment in suspension, as though weather, memory, and motion have briefly converged.

The result is remarkably immersive.

One does not necessarily "decode" a Pascal Benichou painting. One experiences it.

That experiential quality makes his work especially compelling within the setting of Art Ovation itself.

Located in Sarasota's thriving downtown arts district, the hotel has become one of Florida's most successful examples of immersive arts hospitality, equal parts



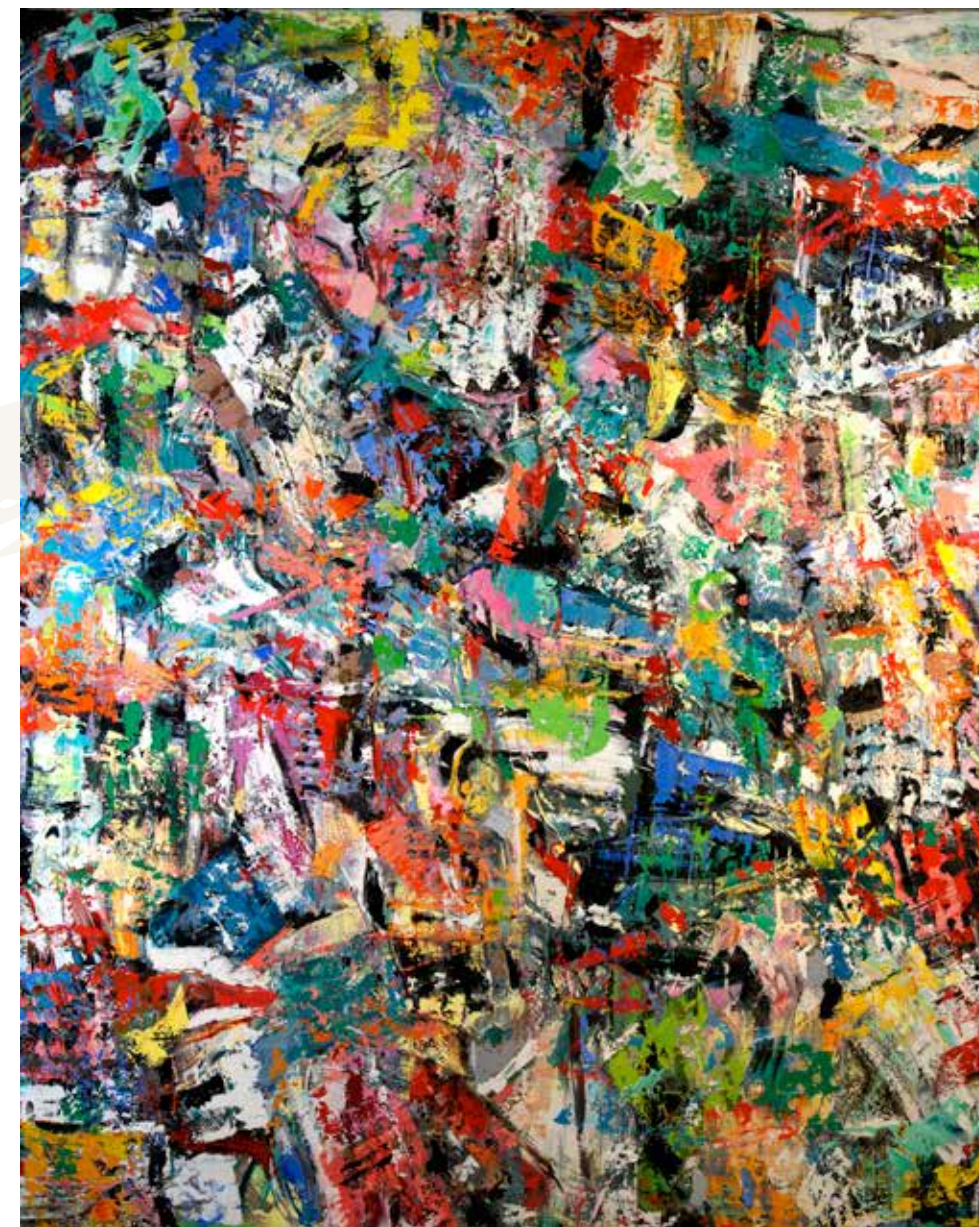
in it. Humanity. Presence. The paintings offer entry points without prescribing a single interpretation.

That sense of presence may ultimately be the defining thread connecting every chapter of his artistic life, from Provence to New York stages and now, to Sarasota galleries.

The exhibition reflects, as Benichou describes it, "a simple yet profound truth: our humanity is found in our capacity to feel." One senses that his paintings are not so much "constructed" as discovered. There is intuition at work here. Listening. Trusting instinct.

Allowing gesture and sensation to guide composition. Perhaps that is why the paintings feel alive, as though the act of making them remains visible within every layered surface.

For Sarasota collectors, visitors, and art lovers, *Places and Landscapes* offers another reminder of why the city continues its cultural ascent. Increasingly, Sarasota is attracting not only luxury developments and sophisticated hospitality brands, but also artists with international pedigrees and deeply personal creative voices. The city's appetite for work that is both accomplished and emotionally resonant



appears to be growing with every season. At Art Ovation Hotel, those worlds converge beautifully.

As proud media partners of Art Ovation and its dynamic arts programming, VENÜ Magazine was honored to attend the lavish opening reception for Pascal Benichou's exhibition on May 12, 2026. VENÜ Publisher Tracey Thomas, Decorative Arts Editor Matthew Sturtevant, and I had the pleasure of meeting Pascal and his lovely wife, Johanne, while experiencing an evening that perfectly captured Sarasota's growing sophistication and creative energy.

Guests dressed elegantly as they drifted through the hotel's gallery spaces with Champagne in hand, lively conversation, and beautifully presented hors d'oeuvres before the celebration continued with dinner at Tzeva Restaurant. Throughout the evening, Benichou's richly textured abstractions seemed almost alive beneath the gallery lighting, revealing new layers of depth, movement, and emotional nuance from every angle.

It was a fitting setting for work so deeply rooted in sensation, intuition, and presence.

In many ways, the evening itself reflected the spirit of both Art Ovation and Benichou's work: sophisticated without pretension, cultured without stiffness, and intellectually engaging while remaining emotionally accessible.

His paintings possess technical rigor, yet never lose warmth or immediacy. They are thoughtful without becoming academic. Expressive without descending into chaos. Their strength lies not only in their visual impact, but also in the openness they extend to the viewer.

Most importantly, they linger.

Long after leaving the gallery, one remembers not simply what the paintings looked like, but how they felt. That, perhaps, is the highest compliment one can offer any artist. □

For more information, please visit:

www.pascalbenichou.com

www.artovationhotel.com



unfolds and direct experience becomes primary."

That philosophy resonates powerfully throughout the collection.

In works such as *Where the Wind Sings*, *Walking in the Moonlight*, and *Autumn Leaves*,