His eyes are dark and intense under heavy brows; his body, lean. He is a serious young man with an amazing intellect and impressive talent as a realist painter with a classical orientation, as well as a self-taught jazz percussionist.

Nicholas Napoletano ’12 graduated from the Hartford Art School in May with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in illustration. Unlike some young artists who may be unclear about their plans, when asked, Napoletano’s response was not a shrug of the shoulders. He was certain: he was leaving for France in June to begin an apprenticeship at famed British painter Peter Sorrell’s studio.

Napoletano met Sorrell in Grand Rapids, Mich., at ArtPrize, an international art competition that Napoletano entered in fall 2011. ArtPrize contestants are judged primarily by the public, except for a traditional juried-work category judged by well-known artists. Napoletano’s submission, a large oil painting titled *Fraternal Codependence* (pictured above), did not win a prize, but it did catch the eye of a private collector who purchased the painting for $37,000.

“Fraternal Codependence documents a series of natural disasters that took place between January and June 2011 around the world. The painting is meant to expose the interwoven nature of all the tragic events—tornadoes, earthquakes, hurricanes, floods, drought—while expressing sincere remorse for the destruction caused in each chosen location.

“It depicts multiple figures encompassed in unifying cloths. They reveal the push and pull between humanity and nature, as each form represents a different natural disaster that has occurred around the world from the start of 2011. An example of the symbolism exists in the upper right corner, where a figure represents the tornado that tragically tore through Joplin, Mo. In her hand she holds a white hawthorn, a symbol of hope and the state flower of Missouri.”

*Fraternal Codependence* (oil on canvas, 7.5 ft. x 16 ft.) was painted in just over two months’ time, working 16–20 hours each...
day, according to Napoletano. He calculates that it took more than 1,000 hours of work to complete the painting, excluding canvas construction. It also took several days to drive it to Michigan in a large truck for the competition.

Art as a major focus for Napoletano didn’t begin until his junior year at Bacon Academy in Colchester, Conn. Prior to that, he had been interested in majoring in architecture in college. When he discovered that much of architectural rendering and model building has become digitized, he quickly decided it was not for him, and art moved to the forefront.

An art teacher at his high school encouraged him to develop his talent and apply to an art school. Napoletano didn’t have a portfolio of work, which art schools want to see upon application. He says he put in many hours creating artwork in various media for his portfolio, then applied to several art schools, including the University’s Hartford Art School (HAS), which gave him the most generous financial-aid package.

Since his arrival at HAS, Napoletano’s development has been described as phenomenal. He readily acknowledges his surprisingly quick progress. “I was kind of on the fast track,” he says with a smile. His professors seem to agree.

“Nick entered the illustration major in his sophomore year, and it was obvious from the start that he was an extremely self-motivated, passionate student. His concepts were always thoughtful and full of narrative, his handling of the technical issues of drawing and painting were strong, and he was always pushing his art to the next level,” says Dennis Nolan, associate professor of art illustration at HAS. “Nick combines the best of the past and the present, telling stories in paint that have both a contemporary feel and an understanding of classic underlying themes.”

Napoletano’s subject matter is primarily the human figure, painted in a realistic, somewhat classical style that reminds one of the Old Masters. He says he admires the work of several contemporary realist painters, mentioning Jacob Collins and Graydon Parrish. Parrish was commissioned in 2002 by the New Britain Museum of American Art in New Britain, Conn., to do an allegorical tribute to 9/11. The resulting painting, Cycle of Terror and Tragedy, measures 8 ft. x 18 ft., and shows two huge, blindfolded, nearly nude men standing side by side in the center to symbolize the fallen towers. This year, Napoletano contributed two paintings to the art auction at the museum’s Spring Gala.

“Nick’s artistic sensibilities and skill sets enable him to produce beautiful work that is applicable to both the world of fine arts and commercial illustration. He is highly intelligent, immensely talented, extremely hard-working, and totally committed to his work—a sure recipe for success,” concludes Bill Thomson, associate professor of art illustration at HAS.

Below left: A painting in development shows a young boy, so far. The artist’s younger brother, Jack, at age 6, was the model. Napoletano, left, says while he was studying how the human brain functions and how the state of consciousness develops, his reading suggested that at age 6 young children’s brains come into full consciousness.

Below right: Napoletano painted Geisha in response to the earthquake and tsunami that hit the east coast of Japan in 2011. The painting, a class assignment in technique, depicts the bodies of young women, dressed in kimonos, just pulled from the water.