

CONTEMPORARY MASTERS

BY VANESSA FRANÇOISE ROTHE

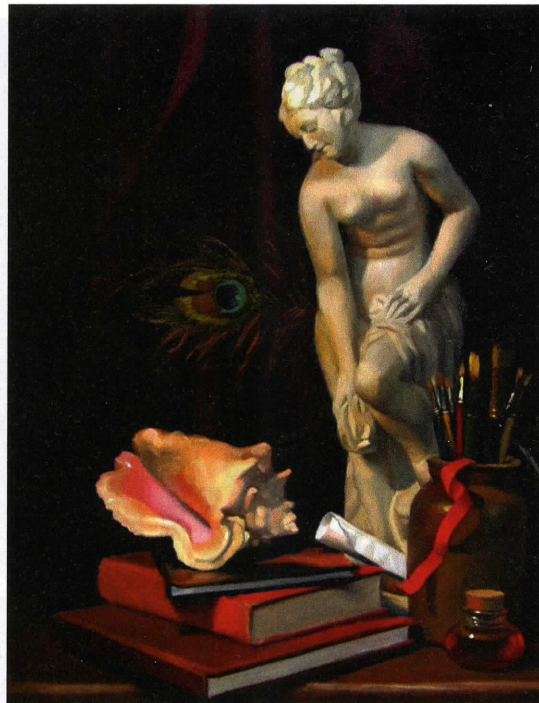
Adrienne Stein

A Contemporary Master of American Art

As we gaze into the beautiful world of Adrienne Stein's imagination, we are transported to a mysterious, almost fabled time and place. Stein's works evoke the splendor of nature, the words of writers John Keats and Shakespeare, and romantic masterpieces by 19th-century artists John William Waterhouse and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Created in a keen and accomplished realism, along with unique color harmony, the paintings also have a place in modern art collections. Her skillfully rendered female figures intertwine and become one with the natural flora and fauna elements that surround them. This winning combination of distinctive subject matter and advanced technical skill, have made an unforgettable impression on art lovers and have placed Adrienne Stein among today's contemporary masters.

A Gifted Youth

Raised in York, Pennsylvania, Adrienne Stein has been drawing and painting ever since she can remember. She was fortunate to be born into a very supportive family with parents who recognized and fostered her passion for art from a very young age. She began showing and selling her artwork locally at age 11, a rare and uncommon start to a fruitful art career.



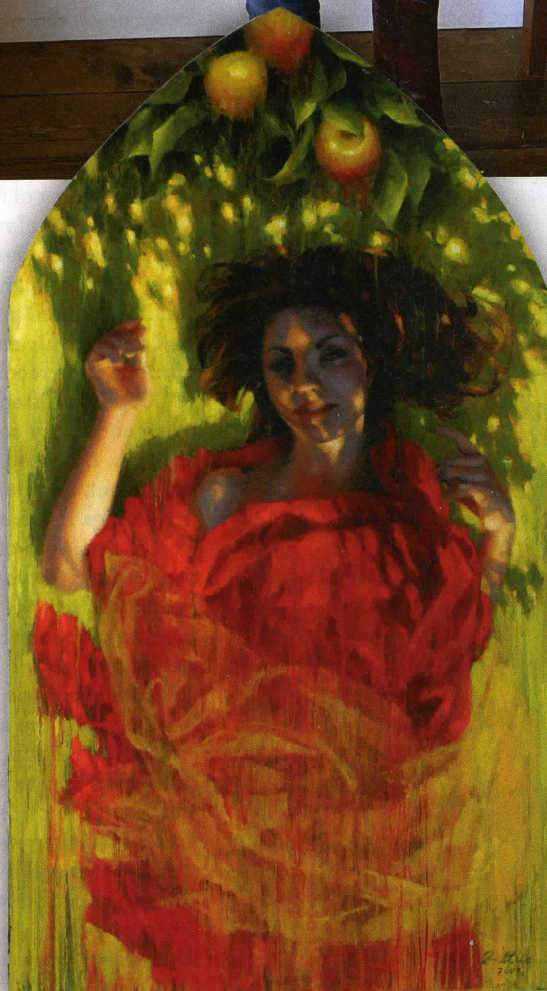
The Artist's Studio, 2002, oil on canvas, 30 x 24"



Adrienne Stein and Quang Ho and their son Liam, now 2, in her studio.

"Art has always captivated me and sustained my deepest focus above all else, even at a young age," recalls Stein. As a pre-teen she received classical training from a mentor in an atelier setting where she cultivated the foundation of her skill. She spent seven years of rigorous drawing and painting from life and creating master copies. "It was he who introduced me to the work of the pre-Raphaelites and other 19th-century artists, who have become the cornerstone inspiration in my work."

In 2004, Adrienne was accepted to Laguna College of Art and Design and moved to the small beach town of Laguna Beach, California, and graduated magna cum laude in 2007. Her classes were technically demanding but also conceptually challenging, with courses in critical reasoning, art history, aesthetics, professional studies and even public speaking. Remembering this crucial time, Stein offers these words to aspiring artists: "My advice to young artists who are currently students is to engage this time with all you've got. There may never be another season of life where you can devote this much wholehearted focus on your work. Treat your work like you are already a full time professional artist competing in the real world."



Under the Apple Tree, 2006, oil on mahogany, 30 x 22"

Gallery Artist

Stein's road to gallery representation was a long chain of interesting events and opportunities. Having already been painting for a decade by the time she graduated from art school, she had built a strong base of collectors and clients who were buying and commissioning works from her directly. As a result, she had the freedom to pursue her own course of study and career goals. After art school, she furthered her education at the Art Students League of New York. At 21 she moved to New York City, living in a tiny studio and supporting herself through portrait commissions. The New York lifestyle "didn't feel sustainable" so she made the tough decision to move back home to Pennsylvania where she lived with her parents while renting an inexpensive but spacious industrial studio. Stein recalls, "This is an extremely important point that few artists discuss—simplify your life and minimize your expenses in order to maximize your focus on growing and taking creative risks as an artist. Moving home was the best thing I could have done for my art at that time! In her mid-20s Adrienne moved to Boston to enter the MFA program at Boston University.



Blue Bride, 2015, oil on canvas, 48 x 24"

At that time, Stein participated in various juried group shows. "In a Charleston group show, my work was noticed by an art collector who also bought paintings from RJD Gallery (then in Sag Harbor, New York). This collector became a friend, and he recommended my work to RJD Gallery," she says. "I was later invited to show there exclusively, which I did for five years." This brought her a new audience and the opportunity to spending more time developing the craft and narrative. Presently, Stein's work can be found among esteemed fine art galleries such as Gallery 1261 in Denver, as well as galleries in New York City, California, and Jackson Hole, Wyoming.

The Nature of her Work

Stein's work is a distinctive, ethereal blend of nature and figure, rendered in vibrant colors and a refined finish in a realist style. Her female figures merge with the natural elements that surround them. Mystical male Bacchus figures, as well as intimate portraits also show up in her work. Her technical realism creates a firm foundation, as florals seem to dance around the tightly portrayed figures with exquisite color harmony and looser brushwork against backgrounds that come in and out of focus. Her addition of bold turquoise and lavenders into skin tones make her work quite recognizable. Stein describes her work as magical realism. "It is still firmly based in the 'real,'" she says, "but with an element of mystery and fantasy."

Stein's choice of subject matter has varied throughout the years. "My first subjects were traditional landscapes, portraits, and still lifes painted from photo references as well as plein air and figure studies done from life," she recounts. "During my time at LCAD, I shifted more toward figurative work. In my solo show, *Maidens and Voyages*, I focused on multiple figures in movement, and during my time showing in galleries in Charleston, I was painting iconic images of women on shaped wooden panels. Over the years, my work has developed a distinctive personal iconography involving primarily figures and natural elements including botanicals and bones."

While at Boston University, Stein was influenced by the abstract expressionists and began painting more large, imaginative works and experimenting with bold and vibrant color. She soon began working with RJD Gallery where her work distilled into detailed still life and figurative works with an illustrative fable-like aesthetic. Stein currently works with Gallery 1261 where she is free to create figurative, florals



The Dinner Party, 2014, oil on canvas, 60 x 72"



and landscapes that incorporate all of her former selves and styles.

Pure Inspiration

International travel is a huge source of inspiration for Stein. “The colors, the landscape, the museums and the people that I’ve had the opportunity to observe fill me with new ideas that eventually pour out at the easel—even if indirectly,” she says. “My experiences in Morocco, Spain and France have influenced my color choices, to this day. Seeing great works of art in person makes a lasting impact.” She and her husband traveled through Scotland most recently, where they taught classes with the group Workshops in France. There they painted many small studies on site and then rented a car to see as much of the country as they could, taking hundreds of reference photos. “The moody atmospheric light and vast green spaces helped me understand artists like George Inness and J.M.W. Turner. These are influencing the paintings that will come next for me.

I plan the composition based on my inner vision and then gather photo references,” Stein continues. “My models are often my sisters or friends and I create a ‘set’ with costumes and props and then do a photo shoot with the model to have a variety of poses at my disposal. The still life elements I sometimes paint from life, or are a composite of painting from life and collected photo references.”

The work she is most proud of is *La Fête Sauvage*, which she created in 2014. It’s “a portrait of my sister and her pet rabbit. It contains all of the visual and narrative elements that I wanted. The variety of textures and details depicted and the vibrant colors (particularly the use of red) created a mystery and symbolic tension that I hoped to convey. This painting was a turning point for me and I knew it was a high-water mark as soon as I finished it.”

A Professional Artist

Painting for galleries and having a solo show is an amazing aspect of being a fine artist. “Seeing all of your own work presented together is so instructive,” Stein says. “You begin to see the recurrent themes and you can think critically about which works are most successful, so that you can amplify those qualities moving forward.” But this can be daunting and often times nerve wracking for an artist. Stein’s first solo show outside of her home town was at Gallery 1261 in Denver in January 2020. She felt vulnerable to share the work she had been so lovingly creating in the isolation of her studio for over a year. “I am a slow



La Fête Sauvage, 2015, oil on linen, 48 x 24"



Demeter, 2022, oil on linen, 48 x 30"



The Gift, 2022, oil on canvas, 48 x 30"

painter, so painting for shows is stressful but necessary to make me more decisive."

In 2022, Stein had the extremely rare distinction of having a work in an auction at Sotheby's and is extremely grateful for the recognition. The Art Renewal Center (ARC) has an ongoing relationship with Sotheby's worked with auction house curators to include important works by contemporary realists to be featured in Sotheby's contemporary art auction.

"It was a thrilling honor!" exclaims Stein. "Art Renewal Center has been a fierce advocate for today's realist artists working in traditional methods. The goal is for contemporary realism to participate in the larger conversation of the contemporary art world rather than a sequestered enclave of its own. My recent painting *Demeter* was included, and sold at the auction." This was a whole new audience for Stein and she was encouraged by the positive response. It marked a clear advancement in Stein's career and further

solidifies her reputation as a contemporary master.

Life Today

Stein attests that her beautiful surroundings and the historic home in rural Pennsylvania she shares with her husband, fellow respected artist Quang Ho, and their two year old son Liam, is a constant source of inspiration. "It is a truly magical and inspiring place. The former owner of our home had been an avid gardener, so our three-acre property is like a botanical garden every spring. Many of the botanical elements I depict in my paintings are from our garden. This and the incredible joyful experience of becoming a wife and mother has deepened my work and exploration of the sacred feminine."

She hopes to teach one day and looks forward to sharing the many insights that were generously given to her by my mentors. Stein encourages artists to have the courage to paint for themselves and follow their own voice. "Owning your

personal vision is hard," she says. "It has been the most difficult part of my journey. I've been criticized for the overtly romantic beauty of my work and told that it doesn't feel relevant to our time. I was told by a reputable person in the art world that my work would never be important because it had 'too much joy.' All of these allegations may be true, but these qualities make my work distinctive and are at the heart of my spirit and true vision. The key is to claim it and cultivate it to its highest expression! As Dolly Parton once said, 'find out who you are and do it on purpose.'"

To see more visit www.adriennestein.com.

Vanessa Françoise Rothe is a curator, editor/writer, fine artist and gallery owner. Rothe served as West Editor and has had dozens of articles published in various fine art magazines over the last 20 years. She has served as chairman of many fine art organizations and is the founder of the Americans in Paris fine art project.