

Aleta Rossi Steward

Amidst the ever-changing outdoors, there are countless, often fleeting, moments of splendor—raindrops resting on a dahlia's petals, the stillness of Pleasant Bay at dusk, or the chase between a Peregrine falcon and a Mourning Dove in the Cape Cod Canal. From her travels across Nantucket, Rhode Island, and Lake Erie, and within her life on Cape Cod, Aleta Rossi Steward has cultivated a deep appreciation for the natural world, translating into her highly detailed and lifelike art.

Steward grew up in a family of artists: her father was a professional musician, her mother a ballet dancer, and her Italian heritage traces back to visual and performance artists. From a young age, she decided to pursue painting. Her artistic education included studies under Master Artist Frank Mason at the Art Students League in New York City, Paul Wood in Long Island, and Sophie Sheppard in California. With each artist, her skills developed in a range of styles.

Oils have always been Steward's preferred medium, and in the past decade, egg tempera has expanded her palette. "I started using



"THE COLLECTORS" • 12" X 16" • OIL ON PANEL

oil paints when I was sixteen. They have such wonderful blending abilities; you can layer them or mix all different colors. About ten years ago, I started using egg tempera. Some of my paintings are strictly egg tempera. Others, I will start with an egg tempera base and then glaze over it with oils for a nice glow. Egg tempera dries quickly, and it's very easy to control," Steward notes.

Each painting's realistic quality comes from a deep understanding of her subject matter. Birds, and more recently, flowers, are Steward's specialty. "Before I started painting birds, I painted lots of other wildlife. It's important to know what you're painting, especially if you're working with animals, otherwise you will come up with inconsistencies. With some birds, the males and females are different, and others change their plumage in the fall and winter, so you need to know these things," Steward comments.

In masterpieces like "Dahlia", "Dad's Roses", and "Diamond Droplets", her portrayal of flowers is impeccable in every blossom. Her most recent work, "Blue Water", combines the warm and cool tones of a water lily. "A study in contrasts, the cool blue and lavender tones create a calming bed for the fiery center of the bloom, with its crimsons, oranges, and bright yellows," she remarks.



"BLUE WATER" • 12" X 16" • OIL ON PANEL

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"THE GOSSAMER TRAIL" • 24" X 18" • OIL ON LINEN

With a perceptive eye, Steward discovers new subject matter in her natural surroundings. "I find inspiration wherever I go," says Steward. "I like birding, so I go out with my binoculars and spotting scope and I take lots of pictures. If I come across something where the light is just right, it catches my eye and I say to myself, 'I have to paint that.' It just happens. I have been doing lots of flowers recently and it's the same thing. I have flowers and birds all over my yard."

While her own backyard stirs inspiration, travelling has broadened her horizons, as she witnesses birds in landscapes untouched by human hands. "I spend a lot of time on Nantucket. I had my sailboat over there for five years, and spent almost every weekend on the boat. Even my boat reflects my interests - it's named Little Wing. I would travel across the harbor to Coatue, the sandy spit that has 7 points on it across from town. It is uninhabited, and is a fabulous place to look for shorebirds, wading birds like egrets, and I even found a Barn owl once," Steward says. "The most spectacular birding trip I have been on was to the southern coast of Lake Erie, in northern Ohio. It is right on the northern edge of the Mississippi flyway, and the birds, warblers in particular, stop and congregate there before getting up the courage to fly across Lake Erie."



"THE CHASE" • 20" X 30" • OIL ON LINEN



"DIAMOND DROPLETS" • 12" X 16" • OIL ON PANEL

Such attention to her craft has gained prominent recognition. "Nice Catch!", an oil painting of an osprey in the act of catching his dinner, received the Environmental Wildlife Award at the International Marine Art Exhibit at Mystic Seaport in 2019. Steward's work had been shown in Trees Place Gallery for twenty-two years, Christina Gallery in Edgartown for twelve years, and most recently in the Gallery at Mystic Seaport. Moving in a new direction, she now shows her work in international and national competitions and is a member of the Society of Animal Artists, Audubon Artists, Oil Painters of America, and the International Guild of Realism.

"My art brings nature indoors," says Steward. Retreating in the home alongside Steward's works, the raindrops on a blooming dahlia or the stillness of Pleasant Bay coexist beside you, allowing nature's passing magic to be continually admired. - Brenna Collins