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ANDREA KONCH



Reinvigorating the Past

Pennsylvania artist Adrienne Stein’s paintings recall classical genres of art, while placing them in the contemporary world.

When Adrienne Stein was 11 years old she began to study art with a family friend who was a painter. During her training, Stein learned how to paint from life in the studio and also spent time outdoors plein air painting. At 18 she began classes at Laguna College of Art & Design, focusing specifically on figurative painting. She earned her BFA from the school in 2007, and went on to receive her MFA from Boston University in 2013.

Today her works are mainly figurative pieces and still lifes that are reflective of traditional and classical styles of artwork. “I do focus on a specific aesthetic,” says Stein, “and I’ve always been really drawn to 19th-century Victorian painting and the Pre-Raphaelites. There’s a storytelling element in their work that draws me in...and looking

at their work, it’s so rich with detail. A lot of my recent works are really inspired by that tradition of painting.”

The pieces are a way of “reinvigorating genres from the past,” Stein adds. “For example, I am working on a large ornate still life in the tradition of Dutch still life paintings, but it’s new in a way. It’s spooky, and there’s something strange and new about it. For me, it’s a way to resurrect my favorite art from art history and reimagine it. My hope is that collectors look at my work and feel connected to the past, but very much brought into the contemporary moment.”

Another such example that reimagines the 17th-century Dutch still life genre is *Babel*, which the artist says is “my personal meditation on the passage of time.” Stein

further explains the work “is a *vanitas* theme, in which I am processing how it feels to be in my late 20s, and the naïve idealism of my youth is being slowly eroded. Even though the insects and vermin are devouring the ostentatious feast, it is still active, surprising, messy and beautiful—the way life is.”

The triple-tiered cake in *Babel* was baked and frosted by Stein, then set up in her studio to paint from life. It became, for the artist, “the biblical Tower of Babel—a symbol for man’s lofty plans and forces that thwart them.”

Blood Moon is another still life by the artist that conjures a biblical reference, and it also has a personal meaning.

“*Blood Moon* was a way for me to create a world in which lurking, menacing

forces amidst lush beauty create psychic tension. I live on a river and witnessed two full lunar eclipse ‘blood moons’ this year, rising huge and red over the river. For me, this signals memories of hearing passages from the biblical

1
Adrienne Stein
with her works *Red
Bride* and *La Fête
Sauvage*. Photo by
Judy Stein.

2
Bloom, oil on linen,
36 x 24"

book Revelation read from the pulpit as a child, in which the blood moon is an apocalyptic symbol,” Stein says. “I was working on this painting as my grandpa was dying of cancer, and as I was struggling with some personal anxieties of my own. When I traveled through Morocco, the markets in every town had gory meat displays and animal heads next to piles of ripe fruit, which created that uneasy sensation of death next to bountiful life. It seemed fitting to include these elements in the painting.”

For her figurative paintings, Stein uses her mother, sisters and friends as her models. She will sketch and take photographs as they pose. “I’m constantly









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3
Babel, oil on
linen, 48 x 36"

4
Blood Moon, oil
on linen, 48 x 36"

5
La Fête Sauvage,
acrylic on canvas,
48 x 24"

drawing and painting from life to practice and keep myself sharp," she explains. "Even if I'm working on a big project where I am working with photographs, I always make sure to be painting from life also."

One of her figurative pieces is *La Fête Sauvage*, a portrait of her sister with her beloved pet rabbit. "Two weeks after I began this painting, her rabbit was killed by our neighbor's cat," says Stein. "The imagery in the painting evolved—its macabre raw meat and rotting fruit juxtaposed with the beautiful young woman, rabbit and flora creates a dichotomy between life and death, showing the full cycle and fragility of all that lives."

Also exploring an aspect of life is a series of "bride" paintings Stein has done this year, including *Red Bride* and *Pink Bride*. The color of each bride emanates from the personality of the sitter—whether they be her sisters or friends who were married this past year. The pieces, as Stein explains, "depict young women, poised to engage in the ancient, sacred rite of marriage, but with strong

personal attitude, will and individuality."

In the portrait *Bloom*, Stein recalls the early life of her musician friend Helena Protopapas "who was born in the Himalayas to musician parents and spent much of her childhood in India engrossed in the natural world," Stein says. "The magic of her early life and the feeling of her music and story inspired this lushly botanical painting of her."

A unifying element in Stein's still life and figure works are the personal codes and symbols, as well as the pageantry of each painting. However, Stein also wants the viewer to make their own connection to the work, and the emotional response of the viewer is one of the most important aspects of her paintings.

Stein is represented exclusively at RJD Gallery in Sag Harbor, New York. ●

Stein was the Grand Prize Winner of International Artist magazine's Challenge No. 88, Favorite Subjects.