

PAINTED NARRA



TIVES



BY LILLIS WERDER

Throughout her life—in difficult times and in times of joy—drawing, sculpting, and painting have remained sources of strength for Warrenton artist Mary Anne Matteson-Sturcken. As a teenager, she was hailed by friends for her ability to create custom-designed clothing patterns. Her journey as an artist began in earnest when a high school guidance counselor suggested



MARY ANNE MATTESON-STURCKEN

that she major in art in college. That advice led Mary to study art history and eventually to explore in greater depth many facets of art: drawing, watercolors, sculpture and oils.

Born in Geneva, New York, Mary attended undergraduate school in nearby Oswego. She apprenticed with David Shapiro and Don DeMauro at the State University of New York-Binghamton. Shortly after college, Mary's work was featured in a one-woman show at the Arnot Art Museum in Elmira, New York. Mary soon married and moved to Northern Virginia, where she began a family. She received a Morris Louis Fellowship for graduate studies at George Washington University, ultimately earning a master's degree in fine arts.

Although talented in several mediums, Mary's preference is overwhelmingly evident in her oil paintings, which evoke a rustic naturalism. Her warm and tranquil images of everyday life include sunlit tablecloths covered with varicolored saucers and cups, a pitcher filled with tulips slightly past their prime and crisp, red garden vegetables.

"SHANNA," OIL ON LINEN, 32" X 46"



Her nude clay forms also feature a hard-edged realism, though tempered with an Old Master touch that is soft, engaging and subtle. Mary notes that her work in still lifes is every bit as challenging as portraits: “A still life can be as narrative as any figure, allowing me to create a recipe for which only I know the ingredients. The brushwork, the colors and the composition all work together to tell a story.”

Mary’s now-grown children are often featured as graceful subjects performing domestic activities. One scene depicts Mary and son Noah at a kitchen table, skillfully arranging freshly picked lilies for a large crystal vase. The honest characterization of the composition reveals a technical mastery of sunlight while demonstrating the casual intimacy and bond between mother and son. Another unusual painting reveals daughter Shannon as



scene and inhale the aromatic bouquet.

Asked whether she paints every day, Mary responds, “Yes, I have to paint! I don’t have a choice. It is who I am.” Claiming to have no expectations when working, she simply allows her brush to find its own way: “I lose myself when I paint, and when that happens, I am the best that I can be.”

a youth, breast-stroking her way through a pool of blue reflective light. She is at once athletic and strong, yet feminine.

Other scenes range from intriguing formal gardens and wind-whipped forests to a porcelain vase boasting boldly colored mums. She also paints macro views of gold-striped squash and gourds arranged in a favorite handmade bowl. Mary’s paintings radiate cheerfulness, inviting the viewer to step into the



Over the past 15 years, Mary has seen her work become more prominent. In 2000, her paintings were included in a special exhibit at the Corcoran Gallery of Art and at Lord Fairfax Community College. Three years ago, several of her paintings were purchased by the District of Columbia Commission on the Arts and Humanities for its Art in Public Places program.

Mary is happiest when working on commissioned paintings for private clients. She often works from photographs, manipulating the composition until she is pleased with the grouping, creating outstanding oil portraits of both families and individuals.

In addition to creating commissioned works for clients' homes, Mary has a special talent for restoring old paintings. During a brief stint working for an art dealer early in her career, she acquired skills as a conserva-



tor, mending, touching up, cleaning and re-lining old paintings.

A former private art teacher, Mary now teaches as an adjunct professor at Lord Fairfax Community College in Warrenton. Teaching allows Mary to combine many of her experiences and training and use that in her own work. "Painting requires me to apply all components of what I have learned: sculpture, brushwork, color and choice of image," she says.

For more information about her work, contact Mary at the Lillie Hill Arts Studio at lillieandrose@hotmail.com or 703-895-2809. *e*

OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: "STILL LIFE," OIL ON LINEN, 30" x 42"; "DANIEL," OIL ON LINEN, 18" x 24"; AND "ST. ANDREWS III," OIL ON LINEN, 18" x 22", THIS PAGE, TOP: "JOURNEY TO THE SEA," OIL ON WOOD, 40" x 42"; AND "DAISIES," OIL ON LINEN, 28" x 36"