

THE ARTFUL MIND

THE SOURCE AND SOUL FOR PROMOTING THE ARTS SINCE 1994

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LINDA H. POST THE RAVEN'S GIFT



Speaking the Language of Birds, oil painting on linen. 75" x 48"

LINDA H. POST

VISUAL ARTIST

Interview by Harryet Candee

Photography by Stephen Petegorsky and Geoffrey Post

Linda H. Post creates paintings of women, the sea, mysterious encounters and uncommon places. Her work can be described as occupying a cerebral, mythical landscape that is filled with reality and dreams. Linda's paintings, pastels and monotypes have been exhibited in museums and galleries throughout the country and reside in many important public and private collections. She has taught numerous workshops in figurative drawing, pastel and printmaking. When she isn't in her studio, she works as Founding Director of the Paradise City Arts Festivals.

Harryet Candee: Where did you capture the moment for your painting, *The Raven's Gift*, Linda? Was the Raven actually on her shoulder when you caught this image on camera, the pre-requisite for the painting?

Linda H. Post: This raven is an invention and did not pose on the model's shoulder! The compositions for my paintings start with the women. "The Raven's Gift" is the second painting that features this beautiful young woman I met at a party, Adriana, who agreed to model for me and posed for a series of photographs. She is part Mexican, which triggered thoughts of one of my favorite artists, Frida Kahlo. The braided fabric wrapping Adriana's hair and the pose were inspired by an old photograph of Kahlo. As for the raven, birds have appeared in my paintings for decades. The woman in the painting is a collector of rings, brought to her by the raven. The raven in this painting is a

bearer of gifts. In mythology, the raven signifies magic, prophecy, and good luck - and is often the bearer of messages from the gods to the mortal world.

When you start a painting, Linda, what do you choose to depict that is closest to reality, and what part of the painting do you like to use your imagination? Can you give us a painting for us to examine more closely?

LHP: Each painting starts with a collage of unrelated images, using photographs I have taken of people and locations. By placing individual figures out of context, putting them in costumes, piecing together landscapes, seascapes, architectural elements, water, and skies, I create a sense of uncertainty and mystery - is it real, or not? The photocollage is transferred to a prepared wood panel or canvas by making a full-sized line draw-

ing. As I paint, I often change components; add or delete figures; simplify or intensify backgrounds; build light and shadow to provide a sense of reality. In the past, my paintings were more overt representations of surreal, dreamlike states. Now I am essentially orchestrating an altered reality - much like a very realistic dream. "Speaking the Language of Birds" is a good illustration of my process. It contains elements from memory and imagination. The two women, Hannah and Syd, are among my favorite models - I started painting and photographing them as young girls. They have never met each other, nor have they been to this imaginary place - a composite of many places I've been. The landscape and fence were taken from a horse farm I stayed at in Westport, MA. The water and the filmy drapes are from the Turks and Caicos. The carousel is from a snapshot I took many, many years ago of small traveling carnival



Linda Post with *The Procession of Hope and Feathers* on display at R. Michelson Galleries in Northampton, MA. oil painting on linen, 132" x 68" Photo: Geoffrey Post



Across the Sea of Time, oil painting on wood panel. 16" x 16"

in southwest France – one of numerous striped tent-like structures throughout my work. The talking seagull became a major character in this narrative.

Can you show us your most loved recent painting, and why this one in particular connects with your core?

LHP: "*The Procession of Hope and Feathers*" is my most ambitious painting, in scale and in concept. I started it right before Covid hit. It is eleven feet wide and because I had more studio time (that silver lining) it actually progressed more quickly than I thought it would. This painting is the culmination of a series of large-scale oils and brings together many of the models from other works. It also has masks, sketched in before Covid. One of them is a plague doctor's mask I brought back from Venice! The title is from an Emily Dickinson

poem, one that brings together some of the themes in my work.

After I completed "*The Procession of Hope and Feathers*", I decided it was time to take a step away from these huge, time-consuming pieces and work on smaller paintings. I have completed a series of six 16" x 16" square paintings that I thoroughly enjoyed making. I began a new series on 24" x 24" square wood panels this past summer, so I guess I'm very slowly working up in size again.

Can you share with us some of your early memories growing up in New England and how it influenced you in becoming a visual artist?

LHP: I grew up in Fall River, Massachusetts, less than half an hour from the ocean. The beach was my favorite place as a child, and summer has al-

ways been my favorite season. I have always been a figurative artist. I was the kid in the back of the class who drew portraits of her classmates instead of taking notes. At the beginning, my work as a mature artist was mostly of female figures occupying interiors. But the figures wanted to escape those rooms, and as they moved outdoors I had to teach myself how to make the landscapes as real as the people in them. I do love the clear light of the sea, so the landscapes eventually moved from the Connecticut River Valley (where I live) to the beaches of Cape Cod and the islands of the Caribbean (where I visit). And the original inspiration for the mysterious striped tents in much of my work came from a photo of beach cabanas on Martha's Vineyard.

The R. Michelson Galleries in Northampton
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Guanacaste, oil painting on wood panel. 16" x 16"

has represented your work for many years. Are there other galleries as well that represent your work? Do you hold open studios?

LHP: I have been represented by R. Michelson Galleries in Northampton since the early 80's – I was one of the first artists they signed on when they opened, and I've had many solo shows there. In the past I have also been represented by galleries in New York City, Boston, and Miami. I was recently juried in as a member of the National Association of Women Artists (NAWA), and I have work in upcoming NAWA exhibits in New York City this fall. I rarely hold open studios. My website is regularly updated with new work. It also has a place where one can sign up to receive notices of upcoming shows and my occasional e-newsletters about what's happening in my studio: www.LHPost.com

Over stocked in paintings, may not be an issue for you, but it is for so many artists. What to

do with our art that is in our studios collecting dust? Is this a reality for you, as well?

LHP: I am not at all a fast painter, so this isn't as much of an issue for me. My large-scale paintings can take up to a year to complete. I have sold hundreds of pieces of art over the years. Admittedly the smaller ones are easier to sell – they actually fit on the walls of normally-scaled homes. R. Michelson Galleries in Northampton has some of my work stored there, so they can give clients more choices and change their wall displays to keep things fresh. I do try to keep a good selection of recent work in my studio, so I can show it to collectors and curators.

There are some pieces I consider seminal, and those I choose to keep in my personal collection. Of course, there are a few works that I kind of regret selling – I wish I still had them!

What are some of the challenges you have encountered being an artist?

LHP: In recent years, my greatest artistic challenge has been time. My day job for more than 25 years has been director of Paradise City Arts Festivals, and it seems that I never have as much studio time as I would like. I have been slowly delegating some of that work, which affords me more time – but never really enough.

There comes a time in an artist's life when we just cannot paint 24/7 but need to promote what we create to sustain us. Is this easy for you to do?

LHP: It is always hard for an artist to find time to market their work. Since my studio time is so precious, and I do so much publicity and marketing for Paradise City, my own art marketing does take a back seat. But not many of the shows and publications on my resume and bibliography have simply dropped into my lap. As an artist, you do have to put your work out there, look for opportunities. *Continued on next page...*



Dance of the Pelicans, oil painting on wood panel. 16" x 16"

I try to be realistic in my goals, not spending too much time spinning my wheels.

In today's art world, so much is going on, and I often ask artists what they perceive as the going trend, or the direction art is being taken, thoughts?

LHP: I have never followed trends in art. I follow my heart and mind and imagination. That said, as a figurative artist my work has gone in and out of fashion so many times I've lost count.

Everyday interactions in your life with people is a great way to acquire ideas for new work to produce. Do you ever get ideas from a conversation?

LHP: I don't think my ideas ever come from conversations. Sometimes they come from dreams – I wake up with a vision in my head and have to make it work as a painting. Once in a while I'll see a face, a sky, a structure, a stone wall, or even

those striped tents out of the corner of my eye and take a quick snapshot. I may use some version of that photograph in a future work. Also, I love words, and sometimes I find that a phrase in a book can inspire a painting – or help me title a finished painting.

How do you balance your time being out in the public and time in the studio?

LHP: As a Founding Director of Paradise City Arts Festivals, a good part of my life is "out in the public". I have done scores of television interviews, radio interviews (a couple with Rachel Maddow when she still worked for WRSI in Northampton!) and I'm always out on floor at shows talking to artists and the public. As an artist myself, I've had lots of gallery openings (which, honestly, are not my favorite thing) and interviews. I am a natural introvert, so I have had to reinvent my persona to conform to all these "extrovert" activities. Having to stay in my house, my

studio, and my garden with just my husband for company when everything came to a sudden stop was actually kind of calming and restful. But I'm not really anti-social, so I try to have a good balance of me-time and out-in-the-world time.

Do you listen to music while you paint?

LHP: I do work to music – in fact, it's hard to work without it. It can be jazz, world music, classical, or new age; the tempo of the music is often determined by whether the brushwork I'm doing is broad and fast or very detailed. Rarely do I work to music with words. It's a left brain / right brain thing. I have found that I can work to vocals if they are in a language I don't understand, like Cesária Évora or King Sunny Ade.

How does your life partner and family members encourage and give you motivation with all of your artistic visions?

LHP: My husband, Geoff, and I met when we



Sirens, oil painting on linen. 84" x 72"

were in college and married very young. He has had my back as an artist since we first met. He also has a great eye. When I have solidified a concept for a painting, I always show him the idea and appreciate his feedback. I have never had an issue, like some artists do, of showing friends and family works in progress. A lot of my friends are visual artists and I take their criticism and suggestions seriously. Geoff and I don't have kids, but my niece Hannah has modeled for me since she was sixteen.

Share with us your favorite artists supplies, please.

LHP: My large paintings are done on Claessens oil primed linen, tacked to my studio wall, and stretched afterwards. I order custom museum-grade stretchers from Twin Brooks in Maine. I use oil paints from a lot of different sources, but my chosen mediums are Galkyd and Galkyd Lite. I also like working on primed panels. I use Amper-

sand cradled Gessobord and sometimes I have cradled wood panels custom made for me. When I work in pastels, I usually use a heavy printmaking paper, like Arches, BFK Rives, or Stonehenge. My favorite soft pastel color is a Sennelier red – when I used to teach pastel workshops, my students and I called it “magic red”.

If you were to go from pastel to oil, what materials would you be going from and to, and what would you say is the biggest learning curve and ways one might have to adjust?

LHP: My original medium was intaglio printmaking. I started experimenting with the spontaneity, texture, and color of monotypes and became hooked. My first NYC solo show was of my monotypes. Then I began using soft pastels over the ghost images of my monotypes, and pastels became my primary passion for about 15 years. As my work got larger, the type of framing and glass that soft pastels require was an issue, as was

the ever-present chalk dust. When I built a new studio, with a big painting wall, great light, and high ceilings, it seemed the right time to switch to oils. The transition did involve a learning curve, but my pastels were often mistaken for oil paintings – they were dense and layered in much the same way one works with paint.

What's new in your life since Covid?

LHP: It's not new, but I will say my garden has never looked as good or been as productive as it was during the height of Covid! And I love to cook, so I experimented with a lot of new recipes – since I was cooking three meals a day and didn't want to get bored. Of course, I also love to throw dinner parties, which wasn't possible. But now I have some new dishes to serve my friends!

Thank you, Linda!