



Be Still

Flowers, vases and textiles are the vehicles for painter's fascination with color and light

By Lisa Aurand



Above: Carol Stewart

Top: *Pattern and Light II*

Opposite page: *Polkadot Painting*

Carol Stewart has a quiet manner about her. In her studio on the south side of the Milo Arts center, she works for seven or eight hours a day on her still life oil paintings as she listens to classical music or jazz.

She arranges jars, pots, vases, boxes, flowers and fruits; adjusts studio lights that mimic sunlight; and, of course, paints. Color, light, transparency and the marks of the brush on the page are her main modes of communicating with the viewer, Stewart says.

Canadian by birth, Stewart came to Columbus via St. Louis two years ago, following her geneticist husband, who took a position as a cancer researcher at The Ohio State University.

Painting, especially still lifes, has been a lifelong passion. Stewart took up the brush in

high school and hasn't put it down since. She has a BFA in painting from Queen's University in Ontario, and an MA and MFA from Fontbonne University, a private liberal arts school in St. Louis. Her first job was at a florist's shop. She worked part-time and eventually quit to pursue full-time painting.



{visuals}

Her move to Bexley has really helped Stewart's career take off. A short walk around the corner to Hammond Harkins Galleries quickly secured Stewart local representation. Her show, *Carol Stewart: Poetry of Light and Color*, opens at Hammond Harkins with a reception from 5-8 p.m. Oct. 17 and runs through Nov. 16. It will feature works created since her move to central Ohio.

Despite the short amount of time she's lived here, Stewart has already made a home for herself among the other artists at Milo. As she walks the halls there, she greets everyone by name and mentions their current projects.

Stewart's studio is south-facing. Most painters wouldn't choose it because of the harshness of the direct sunlight, but she loves the light streaming in, bouncing off glass, enriching the colors in textiles, creating shadows and depth between the items in each scene.

"I like color and I like light and the magic of light falling on color. So the still life is just sort of a vehicle for that," Stewart says. "I like sunlight best. ... Most of the paintings I do, I do with actual sunlight falling on objects."

She typically paints from these scenes set up in her studio, though she has worked from photographs on occasion. Her series of Chinese lantern paintings were based on photographs she took during a trip to Chinatown in San Francisco.

Her oil paintings seek to be representational – identifiable items, not abstract, but not exact, either. She shies away from realism, preferring a more "painterly" method.

"I'm not interested in high realism in my work. I'm not interested in making what a photograph can do. Especially in this digital time, I feel more and more like I want to push my work to the painterly ... rather than really tight, super-realistic work," Stewart says. "I want it to feel like a handmade thing, where you can feel the hand of the artist in the work. I want to make something that a computer can't make."

To start a piece, she paints a thin wash of various colors over the canvas or paper. She then lays out the items she plans to use.

"I just start playing with the setup and color and moving things around, but even after I start painting, it often gets moved around," Stewart says. "A lot of ... setting up the still life, choosing the objects and colors – it's



Patterns from India 2



Ranunculus 1



Seven Boxes



Studio Light 1

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more intuition and feel. There's a thought process, too, but painting is a funny kind of thing that's hard to put into words. To do a really good painting, you have to know how to get into that zone that's somewhere between the physical activity and your conscious, intellectual mind; somewhere in the middle, there, is where it happens."

Each painting explores a different concept. One in-progress work has a shadowed background featuring a thin, sheer cloth. Vases, glasses and other items scattered in the foreground suggest buildings crisscrossed by streets and alleyways.

"I wanted it to have some mystery to it, so the background is kind of foggy with some dark areas," Stewart says. "I'm not going to describe every object. (I'm going to) leave some objects for the viewer to finish. Below, it's almost like the overlapping forms of a cityscape."

Other paintings play with color. A painting in mostly warm colors – reds, oranges, yellows and pinks – is given interest and balance with a few spots of blue.

The wash in the background adds a layer of interest and allows her to play with the transparency of the oil paint to create different effects.

Artists she admires include Richard Diebenkorn, Henri Matisse and Pablo Picasso. Stewart's inspiration often comes from her own garden and from travel. A trip to India inspired her series "Patterns from India."

To learn more about Stewart's life and work, visit www.cmstewart.com. **CS**

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Left: Jaipur Boxes

Below: Two Clementine

