

# Coastalopolitan ART



**Born in Sweden,  
educated in  
England and  
Germany, a  
summer resident  
of Greece,  
Helene Steene  
creates works  
of art in her  
Kentucky studio.**

Many artists have a passion for just one form of art. Helene Steene is comfortable with the visual language of quite a few different techniques and materials: drawing, painting with oil and encaustic (hot wax), painting on silk, printmaking, collage, weaving and mixed media. All of her paintings and pieces have an eclectic, yet tranquil quality to them.

Steene was born in Stockholm and grew up in Uppsala, Sweden, a historic university town. She came to the United States in 1976 and received a classical art education, earning an undergraduate art degree from George Washington University in Washington, D.C., and a Master's in fine art from the University of Kentucky. "I fell in love with Lexington and the beautiful countryside and the friendly people," she said, of the place she now calls home.

Her love of art began as a child as she filled notepads with drawings and paintings, and took art lessons. "I grew up in a home filled with great art," she said, "and my mother has a wonderful sense of color, which she used more for interior design and decoration; but I was surrounded by beauty, and I think maybe her sense of color sank into my subconscious."

Sometimes Steene draws or paints the human form, in homage to her art training, but most of her work is abstract. Mixed media has become a favorite way of expressing her talent and skill, because she loves light, texture and color. By mixing layers of different mediums, the possibilities are endless. "It fascinates me to create a sense of history in the layering that allows me and the viewer to explore and discover more things the more we look," she said.

Also, when she is layering textured materials on panels of canvas, wood or paper, unexpected things can happen. This gives her artistic soul a thrill. Some of the materials she uses are sand and metal, oil and dry pigments, marble dust and fiber.



These three panels, titled "Aegean Cove" I (left), VII (center) and VI (right), measure 12" x 73". Although they look like an intentional triptych, each panel was painted on a separate occasion.



Blue Sky Beams Fresco is one of the artist's most recent paintings. It is a collage on wood, 42" x 48".



Another abstract inspired by the sea, this 24" x 24" work is titled "The Aegean, Eight Bofour."

While she is constantly inspired by life and nature in general, much of the inspiration for her art comes during summer trips to her home in Paros, a Greek island in the Aegean Sea. The Aegean is an arm of the Mediterranean Sea, located between Greece and Turkey. There's something magical about the ever-changing waters of the Aegean that causes her to reach for a sketchpad or paintbrush.

Steene works out of her home; she also has a studio at the Lexington Art League, where she spends about five hours each weekday. She loves to create a sense of harmony and inner beauty in all aspects of her life, home and work, from gardening to being a wellness consultant for Nikken to creating beautiful works of art. "That is something I want to share with those looking at my work," she said. It's all about finding subtle inner beauty, depth and simplicity even when the form is complex. As she says in her artist's statement, "I am intrigued by the tension between figures, forms, lines and colors that ultimately can resolve in harmony."

She usually works on larger pieces two at a time, so that when ideas come to her she can experiment back and forth. These pieces, often the size of a wall, can take months to complete and are almost always commissioned, but she calls them a "fun challenge." With the smaller works of art, Steene has four or five projects going at once, letting an oil glaze dry on one



"Green Fresco II" is 34" x 38" on collaged paper. It is available on the artist's website, [www.HeleneSteene.com](http://www.HeleneSteene.com).



Providing limitless interpretation and feeling, "Red Sky Vail Fresco" (left) is 42" x 48" on wood, while "Red Fresco II" (below) is 34" x 38" on collaged paper.



Now belonging to a private collector, "Paros Vista X" is an example of one of the smallest pieces Steene creates. It is 8" x 10" on rag board.



Another inspiration from the Greek island of Paros is "Paros Vista XX," also on museum-quality rag board.

while she sands the surface of another. "I don't just want to sit and wait for one piece to dry when I am on a roll!"

Her art pieces have won juried competitions and have been on display in more than 200 exhibitions around the world. They are found in both private and public collections in America and Europe. She was commissioned by Maker's Mark to create two abstract pieces, one of which ended up in Chicago and the other in Madrid. "It is enjoyable to come to a place, whether public or private, and see your own work," she said. "A bit like seeing your children doing well on their own after they've left home." This spring she painted a nine-foot piece for the Markey Cancer Center at UK Hospital and a tapiz (tapestry) for the Legacy Trail, located at mile marker 7.

"If my work can slow someone down to contemplate something within her- or himself," said Steene, "if it can add a moment of focus on their inner peace in this absurd world, then I have reached the viewer."

Don Ament, photographer of all artwork

Melissa Wilkeson, photographer of Helene sitting on a stool in front of her artwork