



Alice Steer Wilson: Light, Particularly

Janice Wilson Stridick

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Alice Steer Wilson's art is displayed, and stories told, with a curator's eye and a daughter's love.

Victor Hugo once wrote, "To love beauty is to see light." This quote sums up the rich life and luminous work of the late artist Alice Steer Wilson, as chronicled by her daughter Janice Wilson Stridick in *Alice Steer Wilson: Light, Particularly*. It's an elegantly written and illustrated volume that includes more than two hundred of Wilson's oils and watercolors and outlines her accomplishments as mother, wife, daughter, community champion, and teacher.

A full-time art career was delayed until Wilson's four children were older but then she became a central figure in the revival of Cape May, New Jersey, in the 1970s and '80s. Wilson's portraits of the faded Victorian houses and hotels of this seaside town drew attention to the local preservation movement and shined light on the architectural treasures that were falling to developers' wrecking balls or were crumbling from neglect. Stridick does an excellent job showing her mother's evolution as an artist and documenting her involvement in this battle from her years as a storefront artist and cottager to her production of note cards and prints that showcased endangered historic landmarks.

The book is beautifully designed and full of high-quality color reproductions that are thoughtfully surrounded by generous amounts of white space, much like the mat around a framed painting. These sharply rendered illustrations perfectly capture the masterful nuances of light and shadow for which Wilson's art is renowned. The reproduction values are of such clarity that one can see the lightly rendered pencil outlines underlying the forms in many of Wilson's works. The nine-by-eleven-inch oblong format effectively resembles a small watercolor sketchbook and further adds to the overall impression that one is seeing these paintings in as close to their original state as possible.

Having the benefit of not only being Wilson's daughter but also her longtime unofficial curator, Stridick imbues this monograph with many personal stories culled from family lore. While Wilson enjoyed a reputation as a plein air painter, she often hid out and painted from behind the windows of her Volkswagen van to avoid inclement weather and pesky sidewalk interrupters. One learns, too, that the native of rural Ohio most likely developed her strong attraction to beaches and oceans from childhood visits to her grandparents' Long Island home.

Art historians and collectors will appreciate the reference material at the end, including Wilson's curriculum vitae, an index of illustrated works, and thumbnail images of her line of note cards, prints, and lithographs. The author is, however, careful to note that this book is only a "partial catalog" and that there are many other Wilson paintings and sketches likely hanging on the walls of various homes in Cape May and beyond.

This lively portrait of an accomplished artist captures the many facets of her personal and professional spheres. Those who cherish the art of watercolor and the treasures of Cape May will love to read this lyrical tribute to an interesting and important figure.

RACHEL JAGARESKI (February 4, 2014)

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