FROM PETAL TO PORTRAIT Elizabeth Barlow Seeks Beauty in All of its Forms



escribing flowers as seductive symbols of hope, grace and renewal, contemporary still life and portrait artist Elizabeth Barlow says her latest series of work, Flora Portraits, is a call to awaken beauty. According to her, flowers represent the power of re-emergence that lies within all living things. Barlow spends a lot of time thinking about beauty and its purpose in the world.

"I believe that beauty is universal in the sense that we all find something beautiful. For me, it might be a rose glowing in the garden's dawn light. For [another person] it might be the sun setting over the skyscrapers of a metropolis. Both of these experiences are beauty's way of saying: 'Stop for a moment. Take a breath. Look. See."

"Beauty seduces us into hitting the pause button in our increasingly frenetic contemporary lives. It lures us from our busyness and awakens us into the wonders of the present moment," she says.

Barlow shares a secret that is worth saving: the more we look for beauty, the more we find it. And then suddenly, it is everywhere.

Barlow's move from San Francisco to Monterey Peninsula, California, in 2016, led to a shift in focus of her work. Surrounded by forests and year-long flowers, she was inspired to take nature as her subject. Barlow started creating Flora Portraits; each painting requires gathering flowers, leaves, branches and vines, arranging the materials in dramatic lighting and photographing them. Over a period of hours - or sometimes days - Barlow constructs a composition that expresses the story she wishes to convey.



Arabesque, Oil on Linen, 24 x 36 inches



Reverie, Oil on Linen, 30 x 40 in



What Beauty Is For (diptych), Oil on Linen, 36 x 30 in



Aspire, Oil on Linen, 24 x 36 in



Barlow views her Flora paintings as portraits of flowers; they are representational and highlight the individual character and energetic essence of each bloom. As shared on Barlow's website, she works with oil on fine French linen in a meticulous process and relies on glazed layers to achieve a level of richness. Some of her paintings are portraits of an individual flower and others are portraits of a garden.

"Since my paintings are so detailed, people often assume that most of my work goes into the actual painting process. However, my greatest creative effort and exploration lies in

the composition to look. But nearly every time, the flowers, the light and serendipity lead me in a different direction," explains Barlow.

Speaking about the

parallels that exist between art and meditation - a daily practice of the artist – she notes that painting flowers brings the same gift as meditation: the opportunity to let go and return to the present moment. Barlow says both practices have transformed her life by giving her a sense of reverence that she carries through her day.

"When we set our daily intention to find beauty - whatever that may be - and attune our eyes and hearts to it, something miraculous happens. Each time we stop for beauty, we strengthen our capacity to find it and we begin to see it everywhere," she says.

Barlow suggests that people try letting beauty serve as a guide for one day, or one week, and see where it takes them.

When asked what the artist currently has on the go, she shares that her studio is filled at the moment with five large paintings, all of which are in some stage of evolution. All of the pieces which appeared in the exhibition Flora Borealis at Andra Norris Art Gallery in Burlingame, California, September 23 - October 28.

"I usually prefer to work on one painting at a time, lingering and letting myself inhabit that world day after day. But, when I have a big exhibition on the horizon, I have learned that I need to crank up the creative energy and move back and forth from painting to painting. I walk into the studio each morning and five different paintings are asking for my attention and this fuels me," she says.

Once all of the paintings are ready for the show, Barlow will "plunge into a commission" for a client on the East Coast. She says it is a painting that will celebrate the roses that the person grows in her Nantucket garden.

"I have been musing on this commission for months now, and I long to get it on the easel and see where it takes me. Each commission is a dialogue between myself, the client and the flowers, and I love the connections this weaves," she

