

A MASTER IN THE MAKING

A young Brazilian artist
flourishes in the Cape's art
world—and far beyond.

BY MARY GRAUERHOLZ

Paintings by
CLEBER STECEI



Crispy Breeze
Oil on Canvas
20" x 16"



Harvest Day
Oil on Canvas
12" x 12"



Summer Wind
Oil on Canvas
20" x 20"

Artist Cleber Stecci is perched on the deck of his Mashpee home, reveling in the wonders of the past 18 months: At age 35, he is represented by one of the Cape's most prestigious galleries, Addison Art in Orleans. He paints weekly with the highly regarded Cape artist Paul Schulenburg, and is encouraged by other stellar colleagues, including Rick Fleury and Joan Brancale. He is living in a country that thrills him every day. And, almost as breathtaking, he has painted his sunny deck a shade called Cape Cod Gray, and he loves it.

LIFE'S CANVAS

“I never thought that one day I would build a deck in back of my house and stain it gray,” Stecei says, laughing. The artist grew up in Maringa, Brazil, surrounded by modern architecture and vivid colors. When he arrived on the Cape at age 19, he didn’t quite know what to think of his new surroundings.

“I noticed that everything here is historical, old, and gray,” Stecei says. “I felt a little strange. I didn’t understand that, everything so old looking.” He has come to love Cape Cod and was even inspired by its natural beauty to switch his work style from abstract oils to landscapes.

Stecei has found his niche here in more ways than one. Since he shyly presented a few paintings to Helen Addison of Addison Art in the winter of 2010, Stecei’s reputation as a landscape artist has been rising like a mellow tide that is still building. His work has been noted in several national art publications and his paintings are in collections country-wide. Stecei’s talent, age, and new presence in the market have thrust him to the heady upper echelons of the art scene—all in less than 18 months.

It is Stecei’s fresh interpretation of Cape Cod that draws many collectors, Helen Addison notes. “His bold brushstrokes and brave mastery of color define his distinctive style,” she says. Stecei’s sincerity—what Addison calls his “poetic response to the world”—leaves a deep stamp on his work. “He has integrity as an artist and as a human being,” Addison says. “He never strives for the limelight.”



Cleber Stecei in his Mashpee studio. Stecei, a native of Brazil, has lived on the Cape almost half his life.



Through It
Oil on Canvas
24" x 18"



Neighbors

Oil on Canvas

24" x 30"

Stecei's grasp of the essence of the region is uncanny. *Through It*, a depiction of a garage in Barnstable, is imbued with a light and form that are simplicity itself, yet holding a deeper, more complex story. When Stecei saw the garage, he was taken by the light appearing through it. "It was very simple," he says. He took photos and worked on the oil painting in his studio. He also paints en plein air, smaller canvases that must be completed faster, and therefore have their own excitement.

In his utterly unpretentious style, Stecei talks about the fun of working with paint. "I love the texture, colors, weight," he says. "If it drips or is in a big chunk, I really enjoy it." The somber atmosphere of *Neighbors*, a marsh scene marked with a pair of lonely birdhouses, was achieved with layers of oil. Stecei first applied an under layer of oil paint in thick, broad strokes of red, yellow, and green. After the canvas dried, he painted the landscape, allowing some of the under layer to show through, evident in the faint red streak over the marsh and the heavier colors in the dramatic sky. That, Stecei says, "is the abstract part of me."

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—HELEN ADDISON, GALLERY OWNER

Abstract art was Stecei's first passion. He laughs as he recalls being the youngster in his painting and drawing classes. “I was 14 or so; I was surrounded by a lot of senior people,” he says with a smile in his voice. “My friends were skateboarding downtown. I really wanted to learn how to draw and paint. After class, I would go skateboarding.”

Stecei moved to the Cape at 19, joining his best friend from Brazil. Right away, Cape Cod moved him in unexpected ways. “I was amazed by the landscape,” he says. “In Brazil, you would see that only in the movies.” The area's open spaces—marshes, cranberry bogs, and ocean views—inspired Stecei to start painting landscapes. “I try to keep my compositions pretty simple, so I can concentrate more on the atmosphere and the light,” he says. “That's what inspires me the most.”

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—CLEBER STECEI, ARTIST

Stecei has a sister in Centerville and his father, a former Cape Codder, travels from Brazil for long visits. (Stecei's mother died when he was 15.) Stecei holds down a job at a woodworking shop in Hyannis, then paints at night and on weekends. He has a six-year-old daughter, Stella, whom he calls an inspiration and "already a little artist."

Stecei's gratitude for his life adds to the depth and meaning of his art. He recalls the day he walked into Addison Art Gallery with two or three paintings under his arm. "I had no experience with the art market," he says. "I figured I'd try there, a big gallery, and work my way down, because I was sure, I was not going to get in." Addison, he says, offered to test the waters and took two or three paintings to hang. "I left, not even sure I got in," Stecei says, laughing. He has been a strong presence at the gallery ever since.

Stecei's world continues its positive, upward trend, and he knows the importance of taking stock and realizing his blessings. "I've lived here almost half my life," he says of the Cape. "I love how things are done on the Cape, the architecture, the landscapes. I used to be younger, listening to punk rock. Then I got to know the history of the Cape and the historical places. Now I've fallen in love with the way it is. It's a gift to have arrived in this art community." 📌

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