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St. Croix's 'Bird Lady' Shows Surprising Pelican Portraits

St. Croix, USVI -- Tuesday, March 4, 2005 – Established St. Croix watercolor painter Toni Lance is mounting a new exhibition of paintings and multi-media works that focus almost exclusively on her passion for birds. Lance is a licensed wildlife rehabilitation expert who has been caring for sick and injured wild birds in the territory for over twenty-five years. She will be exhibiting oils, watercolors and mixed-media paintings, limited edition prints, and video of her feathered friends, with an

opening reception starting at 5pm on Friday, March 18th at the Walsh Metal Works Gallery in Peters Rest.

Lance works as an artist to promote and support her efforts with wild birds. Her latest series of paintings and multimedia works, featuring a series of larger-than-life pelican portraits, brings the viewer in close to the detail of the birds' plumage and expression. "The plumage, and even the beak color of the pelican, changes dramatically through their life growth and annual breeding seasons. The eye color of a pelican turns blue during breeding season," she explains. Her new series of giant oil paintings of pelicans shows the subtleties of these changes. "I want people to come in close to the birds, as I do, to learn about them, and ultimately to appreciate them, to appreciate wildlife."

Lance recently created a set of six notecards as a fundraiser for the St. Croix Environmental Association's new Southgate Coastal Reserve. Each notecard in the series features a lithograph of a detailed painting of a different species of wild bird that lives in the Reserve. The original paintings will be shown as part of this exhibition, and the cards are for sale at www.stxenvironmental.org.

While Lance works with many species of birds from hawks and egrets to kestrels and terns and the odd iguana, pelicans seem to fascinate her above the others. "Pelicans are wonderful birds because of their contrasts and textures. Their bodies have such an incredible design. They can be elegant. But people also find pelicans likeable, they can be silly and playful and that charm can be appealing," she explains. Two of the pelicans she has released into the wild still occasionally visit Lance's home, and their relaxed, juvenile behavior patterns around her seem to communicate that they have adopted Lance as a doting aunt. She takes the opportunity to film and photograph the birds when they stop by.

In addition to rehabilitating and releasing dozens of birds, Lance works to tame birds whose injuries are too severe and permanent to allow them to survive independently in the wild. Thanks to some grants from local donors for bird rehabilitation, she has been

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able to build additional spacious flight cages for the birds. She uses these birds in school programs to give local students the opportunity to see large wild animals up close, and to teach respect, kindness, and a sense of stewardship toward wildlife.

Lance has been looking forward to creating an art exhibition that focuses on her deep passion for birds. She was recently inspired by an exhibition by famous artist Andrew Wyeth, who paints many images of the barns close to where he lives. "Wyeth paints what he knows, what he sees around him. For me, the birds are part of my landscape. I see them every single day. I spend so much time with the birds that I get to know so many of their personalities... they are great friends of mine." Her paintings of birds are both fine technical studies of their physiognomy and contemplative portraits of character.

Known for years for her photorealistic, detailed watercolors, Lance has begun to show more gestural and expressive watercolor studies in recent exhibitions. This exhibition promises to continue this creative expansion and show a broad range of techniques and media from the artist: woodblock prints appear within painted compositions, oil paintings loom on large stretched canvases, even a short video and some writing about the subjects will be included in this exhibition. "If you want to enjoy my artwork, you have to learn a little about birds," jokes the artist. Don't miss this fascinating look at an artist's muse.

Toni Lance's new work will be on exhibit from Friday, March 18th through Saturday, April 2nd, 2005 at the Walsh Metal Works Gallery. The opening reception for the show is Friday, March 18th, from 5 to 9pm. Gallery hours are 10am – 4pm Monday through Saturday, or by appointment. For more information, call the gallery at (340)773-8169.

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Photos enclosed. Byline/photo credit Christina Frederick.

Artist available for interview.

SIDEBAR:

Who: Local artist and "Bird Lady" Toni Lance

What: Exhibiting new paintings in a solo show

Where: At the Walsh Metal Works Gallery, 14AB Peters Rest (behind the Coca Cola plant)

When: Opening reception Friday, March 18th 2005, from 5 to 9 pm.

Exhibition runs through Saturday, April 2nd. (Exhibition Hours:

10am – 4pm Monday through Saturday or by appointment – 773-8169)

Other: Free of charge, parking available

For more information, contact artist Toni Lance. Phone: (340)773-1839

