

# Lisa Egeli: *Life and Art at the Water's Edge*

by Kathi Ferguson



**Spring Treasure**, oil, 20 x 40 inches

*Deep Cove Creek in spring, looking east. The Chesapeake Bay is just beyond the marsh.*

It is said that water and oil do not mix. No matter how much one tries, the two always separate. For artist Lisa Egeli, that could not be further from the truth. From early childhood, the waters in and around the Chesapeake Bay have been her world, and it is here that her passion for painting in oil would take root.

Raised in a renovated farmhouse along the St. Mary's River in southern Maryland, Lisa grew up spending countless hours crabbing, fishing, collecting oysters, and sailing with her family. "I remember soft crabbing on the shores of the river all summer long," she says. "For two weeks each year, we sailed the Bay, once venturing up to New England, onboard [the 30-foot gaff cutter] *Galatea*, a boat that my dad built. The water simply became a part of me."

A third-generation artist, Lisa's inspiration to paint began early on, as she would observe the natural world around her. "Sketching birds of prey was of particular interest to me as a pre-teen," says Egeli. "Later on I worked in watercolor, pencil, or pen and ink, and focused on the things I observed around my home."

A major source of Lisa's inspiration comes from her father, Peter. At age 85, Peter Egeli is still regarded as one of the top portrait artists working today. Like his daughter, Peter began painting and drawing in early childhood. In his teens Peter studied painting at the Corcoran School

of Art in Washington, DC; he then graduated from the Maryland Institute of Art. He also attended the Art Students League in New York and went on to teach drawing and painting at St. Mary's College of Maryland, where he met a fellow painter who would later become his wife and Lisa's mother. "Dad was always teaching," Lisa recalls. "After St. Mary's, he taught classes

out of his own studio and would invite people to come in for critiques. I became a frequent visitor. It was great."

Not only did young Lisa acquire painting knowledge from her father, but she learned boatbuilding skills from him as well. Hours away from his easel were often spent designing and building boats. "My brother Stuart and I loved helping Dad when he was working on a boat," Lisa smiles. "On *Galatea*, we did things like plane the mast, sand the teak, and anything else he was willing to teach us!"



(left) Peter Egeli building *Galatea*. Boat-building, sailing, and art are very much a family affair. (below) In her teenage years, Lisa depicted the scenes around her, such as this pen-and-ink sketch of an oyster tonger in local waters.



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Years later, Lisa would put those lessons to work and build a wooden boat of her own—a plywood V-bottom runabout she named *Björn Again*, in honor of her grandfather, Björn Egeli. But as much as boats and boatbuilding remained of interest to her, it was Egeli's art career that took precedence. Lisa spent two years in college



*Building Björn Again*

in Virginia before attending Chicago's American Academy of Art, graduating in 1988. The formal, more academic curriculum offered at the Academy provided Lisa with the strong foundational skills necessary to jumpstart her interest in portrait painting. She received a number of small commissions from friends and family, and major commissions soon followed.

Egeli's love for painting the natural world and coastal scenes, however, never waned. In 1991, she set out on a nine-month painting tour that took her to Europe, India, Southeast Asia, China, and New Zealand in pursuit of distinctive landscapes. Painting trips since have included Alaska, Africa, South America, and a myriad of destinations within the United States, ultimately leading Lisa back to the waters and shorelines near the Churchton, Maryland, home she so treasures.

As many artists will proclaim, the subject of a painting is not selected simply because it is appealing, but understanding why it matters is equally important. It is all about the connection. "Something that is worth painting—something that you care about—is what is key," says Egeli. "For

me, that connection is boats, boating, and life on the water. I have lived it, I continue to live it, and I paint it."

History and nature conservation play important roles in Lisa's art. Her marine paintings are representative of this, bringing the viewer to places that have seen changes over time, are quickly disappearing, or in some cases, are gone forever. "While I am not recreating what is already gone," she explains, "I do feel a sense of urgency to paint the rapidly changing natural world along our coasts."



*Björn Again underway.*



*Lazy Days on Galatea, by Peter Egeli, oil, 24 x 36 inches.*

*Father and daughter painting together.*







Over the years Lisa has captured on canvas shoreline spots such as Maryland's Hoopers Island in Dorchester County, Fox Island near Crisfield, and Cedar Island in Virginia, each depicting distinct moments in time. In her painting *Momentum*, for example, she reveals a part of Hoopers Island that is quickly disappearing. Although the island remains a working watermen's community, it used to be the primary seafood processing hub on the Bay.

During a visit to Fox Island in summer 2018, Egeli created two plein air studies that would be the foundation for her beautifully rendered studio piece *A Story of Tides*. Here, the artist paints her vision of a vanishing landscape. *A Story of Tides* portrays property once used by the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, as all water and no land. "The property has been fading away as a result of rising seas and other environmental changes, and is destined to become another part of maritime history," says Lisa. "I purposely painted the scene showing all water to make a point. Some of the duck blinds in the distance were once connected to islands."

Egeli's painting *September's Solace* shows Cedar Island in 2001 shortly after 9/11 when she was seeking, well... solace. Today's visitors to the southern end of this rapidly eroding barrier island will detect a dramatic shoreline change since this painting was created almost twenty years ago.

A stone's throw from her home is Deep Cove Creek. "The creek has been my favored subject for twenty years now, and I've witnessed the changes to it over time," Lisa says. "Plans for a housing development nearly crowded it out before efforts to preserve the area were successful. As it is, the creek faces even higher tides and accelerated erosion."

*Lisa Egeli has toured the world, studying and painting as she travels. She focuses a lot of her paintings on maritime scenes in the Chesapeake Bay, but she still paints while traveling.*

*(top left) Ngalawa Study, Zanzibar, Tanzania, oil, 6 x 9 inches, en plein air.*

*(middle) Lisa painting in China during her 1991 world tour.*

*(bottom left) Havana Harbor, Cuba, oil, 8 x 16 inches.*



Egeli will tell you that her marine paintings are not historically researched, and, although she includes old boats in her work, they are not necessarily her focus. Marine art is not restricted to ships and boats, and she defers to J. Russell Jinishian, a leading authority on the subject, who defines marine art as “anything water.” And painting water and what surrounds it remains endlessly fascinating to her. “I become immersed in trying to capture the feeling of it, how it reflects light and color, the wind, the waves—all of that; however, my marine work includes a little bit of everything these days,” she says. “Birds, animals, and aquatic life in general—all are alluring to me. Each belongs to the natural world, which is an integral part of marine history.”

Lisa’s desire to share her passion for preserving marine history through her art was heightened when she decided to join the American Society of Marine Artists (ASMA) in 2009. Not sure at first that her work would “fit with the high seas, historic battles, and blue water” of the typical ASMA paintings and sculpture, Egeli discovered that the organization had broad-



**Momentum**, oil, 22 x 28 inches

ened its focus to include a wider range of subjects and styles. Her own introduction to the Society began back in childhood, when her father joined and then served

as its president—a role she assumed in 2018. “My experience as both a member and leader of ASMA has brought me into a community of incredible artists whose

**A Story of Tides**, oil, 14 x 24 inches







**September's Solace, oil, 18 x 24 inches**

purpose continues to be to recognize and preserve maritime history. Art is an amazing way to do that."

Today, Lisa strives to maintain a balance between her marine art and portrait work. She likes to say that one strengthens

her ability to do the other. "In other words," she explains, "If all I am doing are portraits, they are so academic and intense, I tend to feel I am just the hand, whereas marine paintings are more emotional, free, and have more movement. Doing marine paint-

ings helps me to keep life in my portraits, while portraiture helps to keep a degree of rigor in my other work."

Lisa's enduring appreciation for marine life continually challenges her to maintain a record of how places looked at one point in time. Her never-ending love for the water and her remarkable ability to capture its ever-changing beauty through her art will forever drive her to preserve it. "To me, life on the water is such a primal thing. Like my Viking ancestors, most people, at some point, came across the water or spent time on the water, whether they know it or not, liked it or not, and tragically, whether they chose to or not. That is really amazing." ⚓

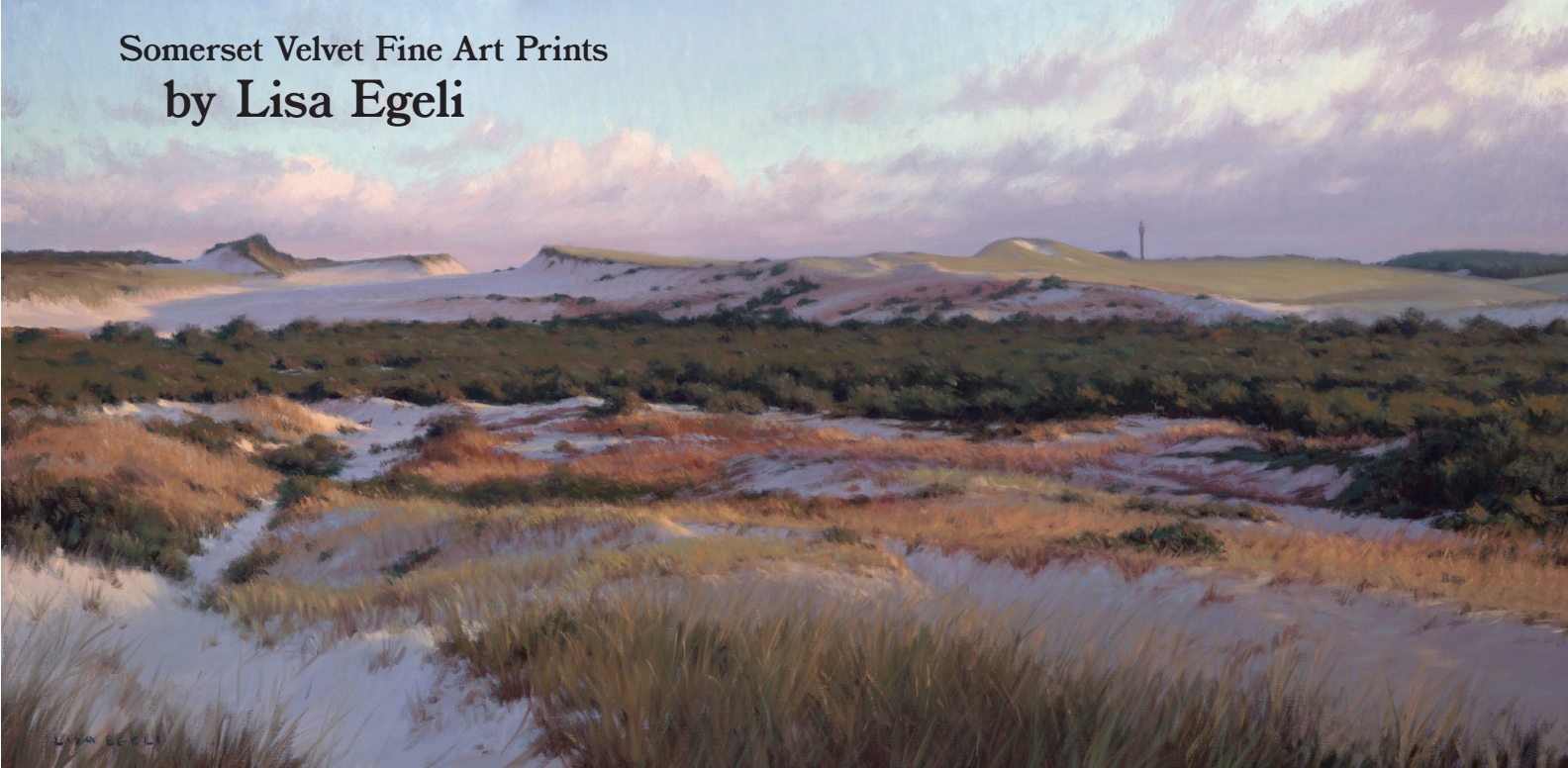


*Kathi Ferguson is a freelance writer with a diverse and creative professional background. Some of her favorite subjects are the people of Maryland's Eastern Shore. To reach Kathi, email [kathi@inotherwords.info](mailto:kathi@inotherwords.info). To learn more about the artist, visit [www.lisaegeli.com](http://www.lisaegeli.com).*



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