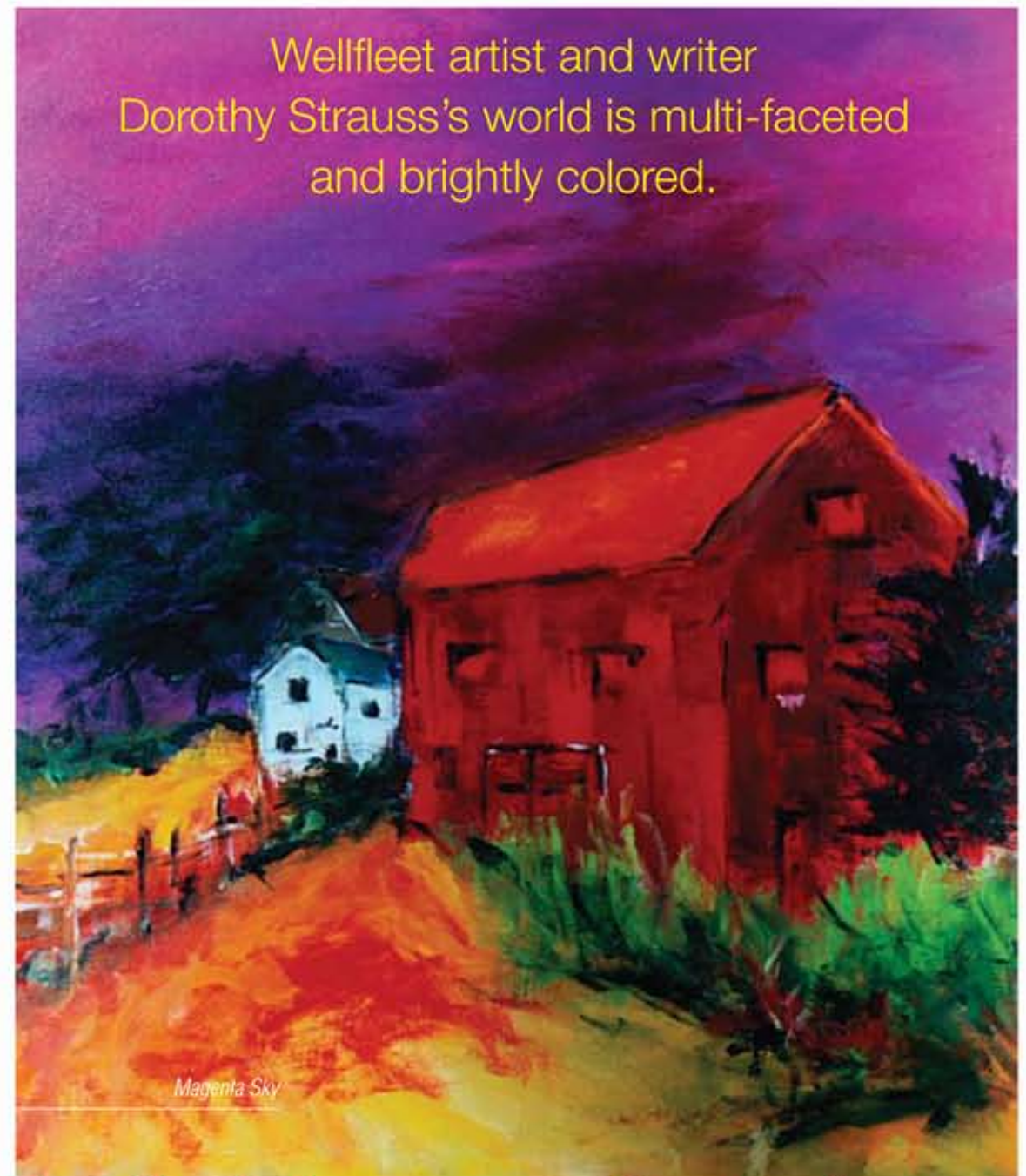


A Certain Slant of Light



Magenta Sky

kaleidoscopic talent

OUTSIDE, IT IS A COLD, GRAY CAPE COD AFTERNOON, BUT INSIDE DOROTHY STRAUSS'S Wellfleet house the rooms glow with color. On every wall, from the basement to a second-floor studio, there are paintings—expressive splashes of Cape Cod's natural world caught in sure flying strokes; vivid, Matisse-like interiors so intricately rendered you want to move in close to the canvas so you don't miss anything; bold abstracts in strong blocks of color that fill the canvas with de Kooning-like confidence . . . this artist's vision and talent span a kaleidoscopic array of styles and mediums.

BY SUSAN DEWEY



Zen Afternoon

Having grown up in the multi-cultural neighborhood of New York City's Washington Heights, Strauss is all about pushing the envelope. Dressed in an orange sweatshirt, purple turtle-neck, jeans—and bright red socks—she looks as if she stepped out of one of her canvases. Her brown eyes snap with life and enthusiasm—she reaches out often during conversations to touch you. There is just nothing half-hearted about Dorothy Strauss, which is why she is so happy living on the edge of civilization in Wellfleet. The

small Cape-style house at the end of a winding road where she lives with her longtime partner, Babe, is fittingly perched on the wild edge of the Outer Cape's twisted, scrub-pine-and-pin-oak woods.

This is an artist whose style can't be labeled—she will tell you that expressionism is the dominant force behind the landscapes, seascapes, and interiors that are currently flying off the walls of the Rowley Gallery in Orleans and other Cape Cod galleries. Strauss makes connections with the person

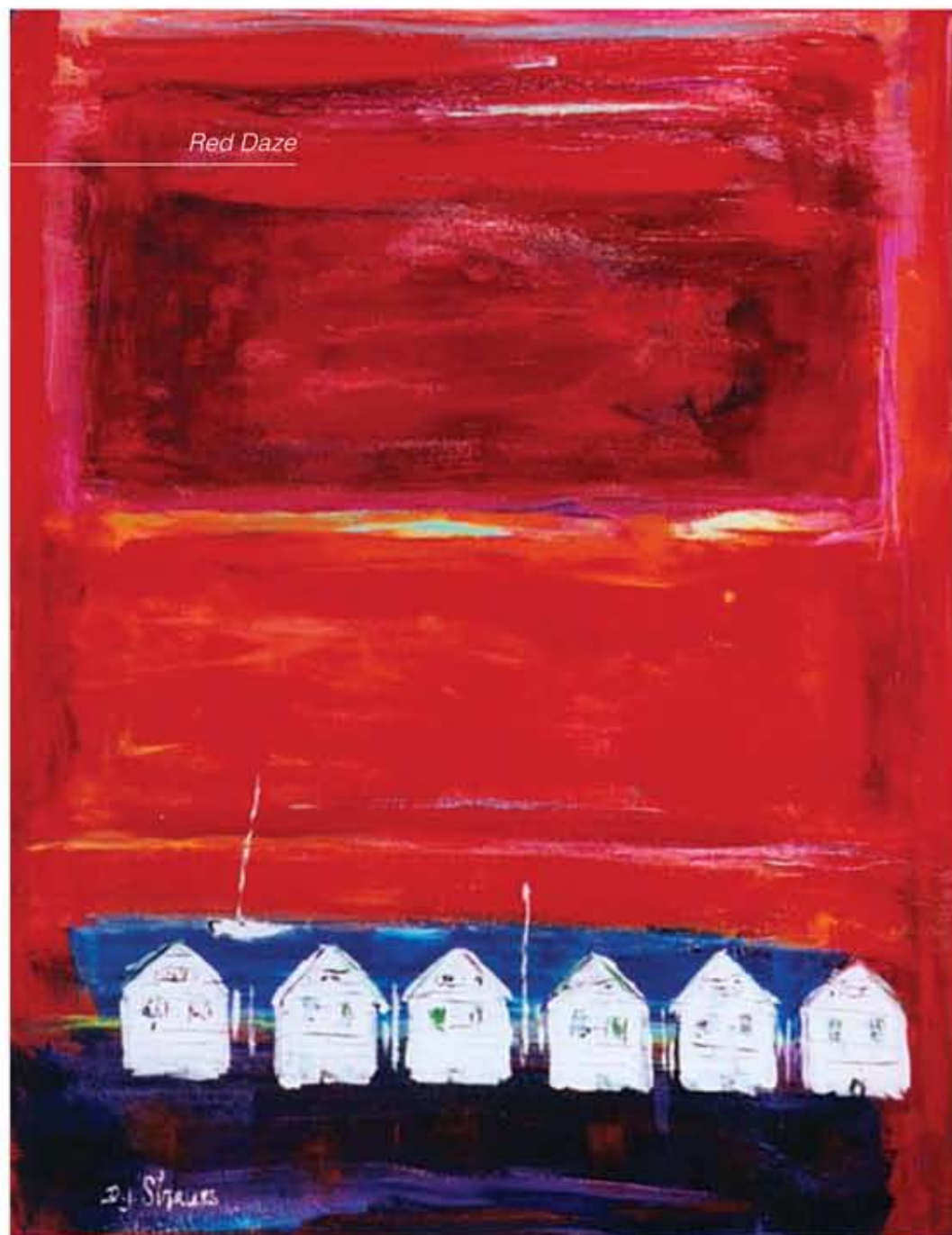


Baby Grand

looking at her work—she wants her paintings to reach out and grab you, to establish an unforgettable emotional connection with her intense juxtapositions of color and line. The themes in her paintings, which range in size from tiny 3 x 4-inch gems to sprawling canvases several feet wide, may have realistic elements—her musicians, horses, cats, Cape Cod sights, and more are found in several pieces—but that reality is very personal, subjective, and filtered through a far-ranging imagination.

In many of Strauss's paintings, there is a jarring note. In "A Certain Slant of Light," a work similar to several featured in a current Rowley Gallery show, a peaceful, domestic scene of a

woman leaning gracefully out a summer window has a strange edge—the water outside rises almost above the woman's head, as if it might drown her. White, almost garish light glares through wide-open windows into an intimately detailed room. A chess board sits at an odd angle, as if it might tip over. In "Magenta Sky," a typical Cape Cod scene of a simple white farmhouse and a red barn is intense, almost threatening. The barn's blood-red shadow falls on a bright-yellow field, dark trees seem to be closing in over the buildings, and the sky is an almost shocking magenta and purple. "Sometimes people will say things to me like, 'That is a very strange sky,'" says Strauss standing in front of the painting. "But I have seen skies that color . . . I don't ask for these ideas, they just come to me."



Things are often not what they seem in Strauss's paintings, and some viewers may be uncomfortable with her brave virtuosos of color and form: of orchestras clustered together as if for safety, seeming to float off into space as an oversized conductor waves his wand; by beach scenes where the chairs turn away from the ocean; and landscapes that seem to melt away without definition. But as an artistic

spirit without boundaries, Strauss isn't concerned if people are uncomfortable with her art, as long as some kind of connection is made.

Her ability to communicate, to interact with those around her—to make people sit up and take notice—was honed during 30 years of teaching English in New York City schools. She has a masters degree in literature and is, in fact, a published novelist. Her book



Strauss wants her paintings to reach out and grab you, to establish an unforgettable emotional connection with her intense juxtapositions of color and line.

Crescendo, sold in local bookshops and some art galleries, is a steamy page-turner about a woman whose idyllic life is turned upside down during a Cape Cod summer vacation.

Written with a relaxed, fast-moving conversational ease and an artist's expressive ability to capture both internal and external landscapes with sensi-

tive immediacy, the 450-page book is the kind of self-discovery story women love to devour. The cover art is one of Strauss's vivid seascapes paintings, of a woman wandering through sun-warmed summer fields beneath a menacing deep-blue sky.

When she is asked which means more to her—writing or painting—Strauss has to stop and think for a few minutes. It is obvious she loves to do both, that she can get into the "zone" with either a paintbrush or a pen in her hand. Still, she says that in her heart of hearts, writing matters more. "You know, I think writing is more important—because it has the ability to change people's way of thinking, to open people up to possibilities," she says. "My painting is fun for me . . . no matter how many times I hear praise for my painting, I think to myself 'almost anyone can do this.'" 🗝

Susan Dewey is managing editor at Cape Cod Life Publications.