

Mary Sterner Lawson

An exhibiting artist in Georgia and Florida since the mid-eighties, Ohio native Mary Sterner Lawson works primarily in watercolor, pen and ink, and acrylic, graphite, and clay. Months spent in Finland and the Netherlands, two Fulbright-Hays month-long programs to China and Brazil and extensive travels outside the United States have provided subject matter for ink drawings and paintings. New scenes decidedly inspire her: she came back from her first visit to China with over 200 drawings.

Throughout her 32 years teaching English at Albany State University in Georgia, she often honed her portrait sketching skills in hours of prolonged academic meetings. In her teaching career and during her years in Florida she has continued studio work in a variety of media, and exhibited paintings in countless solo and group shows. Subject matter primarily includes portraiture and national and international scenes. Lawson likes to experiment in other media and varied styles, and has spent considerable time as well with ceramics and Sumi-e Chinese brush painting.

Recently Lawson had two personally rewarding and enjoyable stints teaching watercolor. In December of 2018 she taught on the nine sea days of a transatlantic Royal Caribbean cruise from Barcelona to Tampa. Then in January of 2019 she taught on the four sea days of another RCL ship.

Her art focus intersected her writing interests when she illustrated and edited books on Alaska and Antarctica for travel writer Terry Breen. A 1996 painting by Lawson, *June Bug's Grocery*, led her into the field of oral history and to a project focusing on a South Albany African American community that was devastated by a catastrophic 1994 flood. Her book, *June Bug's Grocery and the Cornfield Jook: A South Albany Oral History*, published by Arcadia Publishing Company in 2003, includes some of her photographs and drawings and again may soon be available in a second edition.

While she relishes illustrating social groups and natural scenes, Lawson is particularly partial to catching decisively the fleeting spirit of a scene or person. Over the years she has amassed a surprising number of autographed celebrity sketches, many of which were on exhibit for several months at Tallahassee's Leon County Public Library. Lawson has regularly been the brochure artist for the Tallahassee Artist Series, and in both 2017 and 2018 was the artist who painted the watercolors of the houses featured in the Tallahassee Symphony's Tour of Homes benefit. She also designed the cover for the *Voces Angelorum* brochure. She believes in volunteering and in art, and in combining those interests.

Her favorite travel equipment includes a Pigma Micron pen, smooth paper, and a small portable watercolor set. She is rarely without a sketchbook. The product of Lawson's efforts pleases her most if she thinks her painting registers how a scene *feels*, not merely how it *looks* or if her clay sculpture makes tangible a perception.