**Amy Pollien**

***Strawberries and Grapes in Morning Light***

 *Despite our short summers and Zone 3 winters my Maine garden has a few consistent star providers and among them are grapes and strawberries. The grapes in this painting are a variety named “Beta” originated by Louis Suelter in Minnesota in 1881. Beta (pronounced Bett-uh, not Bay-tuh) was his wife. Three plants are enough to produce gallons of grape juice concentrate that I bottle for the winter with perhaps a few jars of jelly (made in the steamer) and jam (made with crushed whole fruit) on the side. The long vines cover the south facing driveway slope and seem to prosper in the dry, unimproved gravel and noonday heat. Every year I cut them back so they don’t cross our dirt road and invade the neighbors! By August there are plenty of tight-packed purple clusters to pile into a still life set-up and I can enjoy the fragrance while I paint.*

 *The strawberries grow in a cooler, slightly shady area of the garden bordered by giant oaks and spruce trees. It’s a low area that shares water with our marsh; helpful because it’s important that the plants stay moist during the bloom and pollination season. I mulch them with seaweed to discourage the chipmunks and red squirrels that would otherwise start munching on the berries before the humans consider them ripe! I grow two varieties, Honeoye and Sparkle, and they look very similar in the rows. The Honeoye grows a slightly larger berry - and both types are soft and fragile so they’re not typically seen at market. We make jam with the fruit we don’t eat fresh on cereal or in a baked pie shell with frozen whipped cream. The berries don’t hold up well to sitting in the sun while I paint so for this piece, I decided to depict them still hanging on the plants in the early morning, when they look their best.*

 *My great aunt, Loris Mae Wiley, never married and if she heard someone refer to her as a “maiden aunt” would gently correct them to “career woman”. She started her career at Aetna Life and Casualty in Hartford Ct in the 1930’s at eight dollars a week. New office supplies required returning one’s pencil stub or expired typewriter ribbon in exchange for a new one. The bus ride from her mother’s house in Bloomfield to her office building downtown cost a nickel for a round trip. As a little girl she brought me with her to shops and restaurants, taught me to play whist and canasta, and later she encouraged me to go to college - preferably far away to a big city. When she passed away in 1992, she left me a diamond brooch in the shape of the crescent moon and the Irish Waterford compote that was her retirement gift after 60 years with Aetna. It’s a lovely piece, but has a complicated structure and coloration. After many studies this is the first painting that features the compote as an element in its own right, the morning sun shining through the thicker, aged glass at the base and reflecting back just a bit of the purple from the grapes and the pink of the morning sky.*