

Sights & Sounds

JP Open Studios Preview Barney Levitt: Painter

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SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

Painter Barney Levitt draws inspiration from the 17th century Dutch masters but creates his work with a decidedly contemporary focus. Like the masters Rembrandt and Vermeer, Levitt paints his subjects realistically with an almost obsessive observation of objects from ordinary life. However, Levitt uses his subjects to explore a larger theme of the struggle between man and nature, a theme that resonates in current debates about environmental destruction.

Still-life displays figure predominately in Levitt's work from a traditional setup he paints from observation, to a more surreal image combining disparate objects, photographic references and his imagination. "I find objects that grab me or have a symbolic significance—a bird's nest, eggs and feathers, for example. Other times I use fruits and vegetables to create a storyline," he said in a recent interview. The result is always a highly detailed and rendered work.

Levitt creates his work one painting at a time. He works at a rapid pace for 10 to 12 hours a day on a piece until it's finished, completing a 16-by-20-inch in four or five days. "I have always worked with oil paints. I love the feel and its malleability," he said.

Levitt received his art degree from SUNY Oswego and was a ski instructor in Colorado before settling in the Boston area and finally in Jamaica Plain in 1986. "I have always drawn since I was a child," he recalled, so it was surprising to learn he never showed his work to anyone except his family and friends until participating in Jamaica Plain Open Studios in 2003.

"Open Studios was a wonderful



Courtesy Photo

"Waiting for Butter" is an oil on canvas by JP artist Barney Levitt.

affirmation of my work and gave me the confidence to apply to the Copley Society of art," he said. "The Copley Society of art is the oldest co-operative gallery in the country where some well-known artists like Winslow Homer and Mary Cassatt got their start. The gallery provides wonderful support for emerging artists by getting you involved and helping to launch your career."

A few of Levitt's paintings can be seen at the ongoing small works show at the Copley Society, or by visiting his web site www.barneylevitt.com anytime. He will show a wide range of work at Jamaica Plain Open Studios this fall.

"I like Open Studios because of the feedback from the audience

and the other artists," Levitt said. "Jamaica Plain has a wonderful group of artists who are very supportive of each other. I love the feel of JP, especially the green spaces of Jamaica Pond and the Arboretum along with the centralized business area. JP really feels close-knit."

Jamaica Plain Open Studios is an annual free weekend-long celebration of the arts where over 250 local artists display and sell their original work. This year, Open Studios occurs Sat., Sept. 30 and Sun., Oct. 1. Visit the web site www.jpopenstudios.com for more information about the event, participating artists and volunteer opportunities.

The writer is coordinator of JP Open Studios, 2006.