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Local artists' work offers glimpses of our modern world

By John T. Miller



"Path to the Beach" by Jeanette Crawford Baird
Photos provided

Taking their inspiration from the 19th century Impressionists, a pair of local artists will be showcased at the Orinda Library with their paintings titled "21st Century Flaneurs." The show will run through the month of July.

The word flaneur originally meant a loungeur, or loafer, but in the context of the Impressionist movement came to mean someone who strolled through the modern world to observe and record that world.

Jeanette Crawford Baird and Joanne Taeuffer, both members of Bay Area Studio Artists located in the Saranap area, have chosen to adopt the lifestyle of the flaneurs in their approach to their art. Rather than get caught up in the hustle and bustle of deadlines, traffic jams, and checking their phones for updates, the two prefer to stand back and use their paintings to portray glimpses of modern life.

Both artists are self-professed Francophiles, traveling often to France and immersing themselves in

the French milieu. While taking a French language class, Taeuffer was introduced to the concept of the flaneur and suggested that she and Baird adopt the idea in the way they pursued their art.

Another similarity between the two women is that they both got into painting later in life as they neared 50 years of age.

Baird took up painting when the last of her three boys left home for college, leaving her with an empty nest, while Taeuffer, who did not have children, retired early due to shaky economic times with her internet business.

They both eventually enrolled in art classes with Marcy Wheeler, a local artist with a studio in Lafayette, and joined with a small group of other women artists to form BASA. Five years ago, Wheeler relocated her studio to Boulevard Way in the Saranap area.

Once the two of them put brush to canvas, however, their approaches are quite different.

Baird says, "When the last of my boys moved away, I searched for serenity and calm in my paintings." She began with a Realism style, but now paints more in the way of Impressionism. "Taking workshops with a variety of teachers has led me to develop my own sense of taste. My painting is constantly evolving,"

She works slowly on her subjects and portrays serenity through the use of muted colors and a restrained sense of emotion.

Taeuffer, on the other hand, calls her brand of painting Expressionism. Her artwork is filled with color and life's quirkiness. A turning point for her came when she was introduced to acrylic paints by Wheeler.

"I like to work quickly, splashing color on the canvas," she says. "Acrylic paints dry so much faster than oils, it allows me to get the scene down quicker. Plus I can cover up my mistakes sooner."

Their two visions complement and contrast with one another throughout the show. There are approximately 36 paintings shown, with prices ranging from \$300 to \$2,200. Some of the pieces are not for sale, however.

Writing in the Paris Review, Bijan Stephen notes that, with increased productivity and the influence of technology, "The idea of flaneurie as a desirable lifestyle has fallen out of favor," but he wonders if it might be due for a revival: "The figure of the flaneur ... removes himself from the world while he stands astride its heart."

While Stephen writes using the male gender exclusively, Baird and Taeuffer challenge that assumption, calling themselves the 21st century flaneuses.

A well-received reception, attended by over 100 guests, was held on July 7 at the library gallery. Also on display were "Illuminating Illustrations and Their Books" by Elaine and Rob Drew, and "Paintings and Painted Wine Bottles" by Kath Balmuth. The exhibit will run through July 31 at the Orinda Library at 26 Orinda Way from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday through Thursday; 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Friday and Saturday; and from 1 to 5 p.m. Sunday. For more information on the artists, see their websites at JeanetteBaird.com and JoanneTaeuffer.com.



Self portrait by Joanne Taeuffer



"Rockin out on the Bay" by Joanne Taeuffer



Self portrait by Jeanette Crawford Baird

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