

An Exhibit of Landscape Paintings at the Historical Society of Princeton Captures Historic Buildings and Farms by PAP-SE artist Brett Weaver

"I feel like I paint with a gun to my head," Brett Weaver says matter-of-factly, "to get it before the light changes." This direct "jump right out and attack it" approach at first seems to contrast with the fragility and atmospheric beauty of his landscapes. But then it all makes sense: depicting ephemeral moments in nature demands every ounce of vigor you've got.

Fortunately enough, Princeton offers many opportunities for this type of artistic workout. A new exhibition at the Historical Society of Princeton, "Landscapes by Brett Weaver," portrays the timeless aspect of the area. Mr. Weaver came to Princeton to visit friends, and soon learned of its landscape-worthy locales. Sites such as the D&R Canal, Mountain Lakes Nature Preserve and Carnegie Lake are recognizable in his plein air paintings. *En plein air* is a French expression that means "in the open air," and is used to describe the act of painting out-of-doors rather than in a studio.

What many viewers may not recognize — yet — is the historic Updike Farmstead, which the Historical Society acquired in 2004. The farm buildings and land are being rehabilitated for public use. Says curator Eileen Morales, "This exhibition presents an exciting chance to demonstrate the numerous opportunities for programming at the site, including as a place to inspire the artistic community."



Mr. Weaver shares his personal philosophy: "It's not about a pretty picture. It's about a bigger quality." Inspired by American Impressionists and Tonalists, he uses daubs and dashes of paint that create a feeling of spinning but somehow standing stock-still at the same time. To Mr. Weaver, "It's not about painting a million leaves. It's about capturing all of those in the stroke of a brush."

After having completed his education and working successfully as a civil engineer for six years, Mr. Weaver decided to resign in order to heed his growing need for personal fulfillment as an artist. "Coming from Tennessee, it was really unheard of. Everyone thought I was nuts," he says, laughing. He's more honest with himself than most: "I try not to do commissions because it can compromise the integrity of your art. Whatever someone else sees, I'm not going to see the same thing."

In the beginning, though, the career change wasn't easy. "I had to save a couple years' income to start out," he remembers. He would advise

Plein Air Painters of the Southeast

newbies not to “jump on a gimmick or just make a niche for yourself,” but rather to find what’s real. In his paintings of the Princeton area, he avoided clichés, choosing buildings on the campuses of the Institute for Advanced Study and the Princeton Theological Seminary, as well as those on the land of the Updike farmstead. These buildings figure into the paintings subtly, becoming compositional elements rather than the focus. He did not paint Nassau Hall because, as he explains, “it would become about something else.”

Mr. Weaver elaborates: “I use subtle harmonies and color complements to create a representation that looks simple but is really complicated. It’s just like in music, when something sounds like three or four guitars but there’s actually only one person playing. That’s what I’m trying to do, pull the elements together to turn it into a symphony.

“I see more now than I saw a year ago,” Mr. Weaver continues. “It really amazes me; sometimes I don’t even see telephone poles — just the big picture, a vast expanse of land.” His artist’s vision is surprising in other ways as well, “I like gray days more than I do bright days because the color is stronger.” To add to the intensity, he loads paint on his brush to the area he wants to draw attention to. “It can be like sculpting a painting.”

What he really shoots for, however, is a feeling. “A good painting happens when you pour your soul into it,” he muses. “If people can smell the air and feel the wind blowing, then I would consider that painting successful.”

“Landscapes by Brett Weaver” is on view at the Historical Society of Princeton, 158 Nassau St., Princeton, through Aug. 19. Reception: Aug. 3, 5-7 p.m. Historical Society hours: Tues.-Sun. noon-4 p.m. Donations accepted; (609) 921-6748; www.princetonhistory.org. The painting “Updike Barn in Early Spring,” on view at the exhibition, will be available for purchase at the Opening Night Preview Gala of the Princeton Fall Antiques and Fine Arts Show, Sept. 28-30.