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Dana Levin: Portrait of An Artist

Susan Jacobs
Jewish Journal Staff

Thu, March 03, 2011

Painter Dana Levin is surprised more people don't have original artwork hanging on their walls.

"Paintings don't have to just be in museums. Living with an painting can enrich and beautify your surroundings, and that, in turn, elevates your daily life," she said.

She describes the difference between a real painting and a digital print. "With a real painting, your eyes take in more tones and subtleties because light passes through the oil paint and bounces back out. Being in front of a real painting is like being at a concert and hearing real instruments, instead of listening to music filtered through a computer," she said.

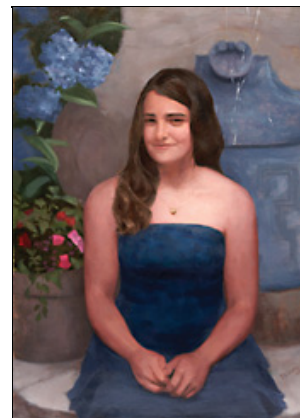
Levin, a classically trained artist, works primarily in oils but also does charcoal and pencil drawings. Sure-handed and precise, her style has been described as "naturalistic, contemporary realism." While she creates occasional landscapes, her forte is portraits and still life.

Originally from Miami, she holds a BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and has studied and taught at the Florence Academy of Art in Italy. Levin has exhibited both nationally and internationally, and her paintings are included in the permanent collections of the Cape Cod Museum of Art, the Everson Museum of Art in Syracuse, N.Y. and the New



Images courtesy of Dana Levin

Above is Dana Levin's still life, Oranges and Glass Bowl, oil on linen, 16 x 20 inches. Below is her commissioned portrait, Julia in the Garden, oil on linen, 22 x 30 inches.



David Schneider
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Britain Museum of American Art in New Britain, Conn.

The artist currently works out of a small studio in her Reading home. She produces approximately 15-20 paintings a year, in sizes ranging from 5”x 7” to 30”x 40”. She estimates that each painting takes anywhere from a week to two months to complete.

Levin markets her work via her website at danalevin.com, and through various galleries including the Eleanor Ettinger Gallery in New York City, Principle Gallery in Alexandria, Va., and The Bert Gallery in Providence, R.I.

Levin has no remorse about selling her work, saying her greatest joy is when “people make a connection with something I made and take it home.”

There are, however, one or two pieces she will never part with. “I did a painting of my apartment in Florence. No photo I could have ever taken would remind me of that time and space the way that painting does. It can’t be replaced,” she said.

Levin really enjoys still life, and is highly skilled in this genre. “Still Life is all about design and translation of texture. What I like is that the design is completely under my control. Nothing is random. I choose all the elements – the Tiffany vase, the hydrangea, plus the tablecloth and the background,” she said.

About 20 percent of Levin’s business is commissioned work, primarily portraits. She wishes more people would consider them to mark special occasions or milestones.

“You will have a unique, artist’s translation of your loved one, frozen in time, and you will get to enjoy it everyday for the rest of your life. Then you can give it to your children, and they can pass it on to their children. Or you can donate it to a museum,” she states.

When creating a commissioned portrait, Levin spends a considerable amount of time getting to know the client so that the finished product will have extraordinary meaning for the recipient. She painted “Julia in the Garden” (pictured at left) as a gift for a mother in Providence, R.I.

“To her, this wasn’t simply a picture of her 16-year-old daughter,” Levin said. “Julia was wearing a dress they bought in Paris, and a necklace that was from her grandmother. She was seated in front of a fountain in their garden, surrounded by flowers that her mother loves. The painting was full of meaning and memories of their life together,” she added.

A portrait generally runs about \$6,000, and the artist acknowledges that the expense can initially seem intimidating. “But if you admire an artists’ work, do not be afraid to approach them and tell them your budget. They may advertise that their paintings sell for \$5,000, but that doesn’t mean they never make anything in the \$500 range,” Levin advises.

She points out that by altering the size or the medium, the artist could cut

the cost — yet still create a personalized and beautiful gift.

For years Levin’s life has revolved around art. “As a student, I put myself in debt building a wonderful art book collection. As an adult, the only traveling vacation I would take until recently were to museums,” she said.

Levin and her husband, Adam, have a two-year-old son, and even he reflects her love of art. The youngster is named Maxfield... in honor of painter Maxfield Parrish.

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