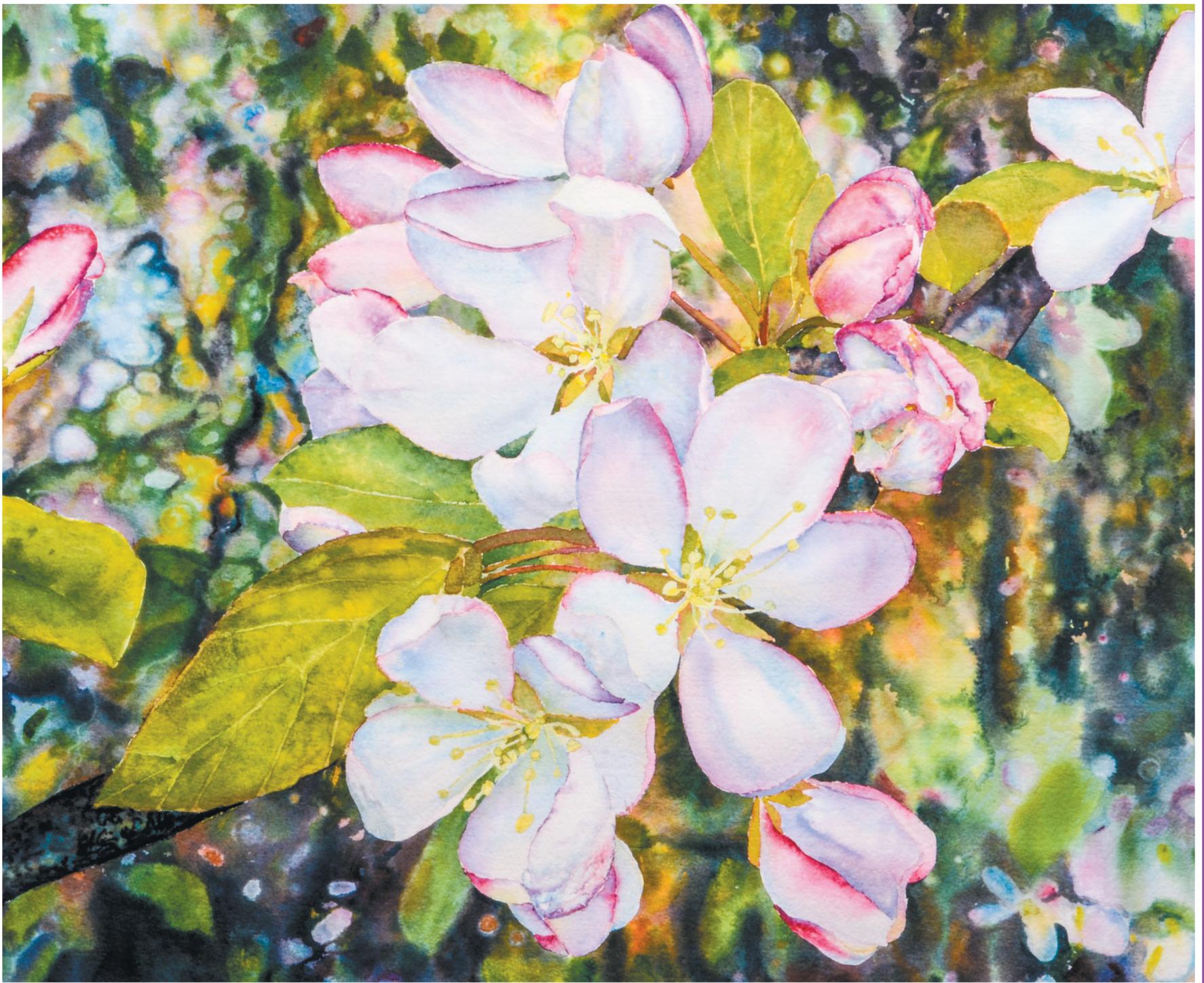


ARTS & LIFESTYLES

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Landscape and Flower Paintings exhibit

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COVER STORY

Landscape and Flower Paintings exhibit opens

Local artist shares his love of nature at Port Jefferson Free Library



Image from Ross Barbera

Above, 'White Camelia,' right, 'Yellow Orchid,' both Mixed Media on Canvas.

BY RITA J. EGAN

Ross Barbera has cherished the natural beauty of the outdoors since he was a child, and through the decades, he has recreated what he has seen on canvas and paper. During the month of February, art lovers can view the results of his passion at the Port Jefferson Free Library exhibit, Landscape and Flower Paintings.

While this is his first exhibit at the library, the award-winning artist has been exhibiting his work for decades at Manhattan venues such as the Razor Gallery, OK Harris Annex and the Jean Lumbarde Gallery as well as the Clark Whitney Gallery in Massachusetts and Long Island libraries.

Growing up in Brooklyn, the Ronkonkoma resident said he would visit his grandparents in Smithtown during the summer, and when he was older, his parents bought a vacation home upstate in Peakville.

Barbera said he still has paintings from when he was about 10 years old, and even though traveling to Smithtown cultivated his love for the outdoors, it wasn't until his parents bought the upstate home that he really began to appreciate nature, especially landscapes. He described the town in Delaware County as a quiet one where the nearest neighbor could be a couple of miles down the road, and while he said Long Island is equally as beautiful, it doesn't have the diversity of the mountains and streams and lakes that upstate does.

"In upstate New York I fell in love with the landscapes, and the streams, and just some beautiful stuff," Barbera said. "And so that became my subject matter."

'In upstate New York I fell in love with the landscapes and the streams ... And so that became my subject matter.'

— ROSS BARBERA

While the artist may recreate the beauty of bodies of water, forest settings and more that he finds outdoors, it's indoors where the painting occurs. He said he is a studio-based artist as opposed to a plein air painter due to the size of his paintings, which measure 4 feet by 6 feet and in his earlier days were 72 inches squared.

Barbera said cameras have always been his sketch pad. In the late 1960s, he owned a Pentax Spotmatic 35mm camera, and he said he would run around his family's property trying to photograph as much as possible. However, he was very thoughtful at times about what to take a photo of with his first camera, because he had to keep in mind his budget for the film and developing. He said nowadays with his Nikon D7000, he can take thousands of photos a year.

"The camera has been a very important influence in my life. The kind of information I need is encapsulated in the photographs that I take. So I see all the subtlety and nuance and tone and form, because it's recorded photographically," he said.

Barbera said he also utilizes his iPad to display images so he can enlarge areas to get a closer look, or he sometimes will go into Adobe Photoshop and change the picture to create the perfect photo on the computer before creating it on canvas or paper. "It's just amazing what technology allows you to do," he said.

While landscapes have been his primary focus since childhood, over the years Barbera has developed an interest in painting flowers. To find the right subject, he often visits the Planting Fields Arboretum State



Historic Park in Oyster Bay to take photos. "I love doing a close-up of a flower, because a flower is something that when you really look at it's an abstract thing that's colorful and beautiful to look at," the artist said.

Barbera, who considers himself a representational painter, said on canvas he uses acrylic paints and on paper watercolors. When he was younger, he used oil paints; however, after being overexposed to the paint and turpentine, he became overly sensitive and switched for health reasons. He said while they may not be as easy to use as oil paint at first, he quickly became acclimated to using them and recommends acrylics and watercolors to all painters.

In addition to being an artist, Barbera designs jewelry and has been teaching since 1980. He is currently an instructor at St. John's University in Queens offering classes in painting and jewelry making. The teacher has many techniques to share with his students, but if there's one piece of advice he could give them, he said it would be that you need to love and enjoy what you're doing, "because the people who are driven usually become successful at their craft after a while if they pursue it. You have to like what you do."

Successful at his craft is something the artist knows about after selling the majority of his work in the late '70s, '80s and early '90s. He is now going through slides and digital transfers so he can track and have a catalogue of his previous work. Barbera said in recent years he has been keeping

most of his paintings but from time to time will sell a piece. "I am at a point of my life that I'm holding on to what I have and my most recent work simply to be able to exhibit it," he said.

While Barbera is choosing to sell his paintings less often these days, he said he sells his jewelry creations on a regular basis through his website and even blogs about the process.

The artist said occasionally he'll receive a call from a lawyer asking the value of a painting due to an estate sale or a divorce, but recently he heard directly from a woman who inherited a painting of his from her father. She wanted to let Barbera know how much her parents would enjoy relaxing and looking at the painting.

It was a welcomed call for the artist who said he enjoys sharing his passion with nature with others. "I'm showing people through my painting, things I like to look at. It's as simple as that, and I hope they enjoy the same — the view — when they look at it," Barbera said.

The exhibit Landscape and Flower Paintings will be on display in the Meeting Room of the Port Jefferson Free Library, 100 Thompson Street, Port Jefferson, during the month of February. For more information on the exhibit, visit www.portjefflibrary.org or call 631-473-0022. To view Ross Barbera's work, visit www.rossbarbera.com.

Image from Ross Barbera

On the cover:
'Apple Blossoms,' Mixed Media on Canvas