



WEST VALLEY ART MUSEUM

Friday, August 27, 2004

Contact: George Palovich
623/972-0635, ext 26 8:00am—noon
gpalovich@wvam.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Encaustic Art of Art Levy January 14 through April 10, 2005

Dr. Art Levy is a surgeon who has specialized in cardiovascular surgery for 25 years. He decided to retire from his rigorous practice and return to the fine arts. Having majored in painting during his university days before turning to medicine, it was a natural transition.

However, a decision had to be made regarding the choice of techniques. Levy says: "When I first began painting, I chose tempera. Then I dabbled in acrylics and oils," says the Scottsdale, Arizona resident. "Seeking more texture, I started utilizing paste, cement and different acrylic substrates."

Eventually, the artist became entranced with a technique that dates back to ancient Greece and Egypt. After the Roman Empire claimed Egypt in 30 B.C., the conquerors introduced funerary portraits using the Greek encaustic style; i.e. wax paintings on thin wooden panels. For three centuries, the Greco-Roman artists created dazzling paintings that captured flesh tones with translucent layers of wax.

The word *encaustic* comes from the ancient Greek *enkaustikos* meaning "to heat" or "to burn". Using heat at every stage, the encaustic medium consists of beeswax melted with a little resin for hardness. When pigment is added, it becomes encaustic paint.

Amazingly, paintings (Greco-Roman funerary portraits) found in airless tombs, created from 100 B.C. to 200 A.D. were in marvelous condition. Lasting for nearly 2000 years the technique is one of the most permanent, given the right conditions, of painting methods. In subsequent centuries, encaustic painting began its long slide into obscurity. It remained there until its most famous contemporary practitioner, Jasper Johns, became tired of waiting for oil to dry and began applying pigmented beeswax to canvas during the 50's.

This centuries-old technique is what Dr. Levy uses to capture - the timeless movements of his favorite subject - cellular forms. "One of the joys of creating abstract paintings is combining science and art," he points out. "Searching for a way to retain the delicate beauty of cells while revealing their ever-changing nature, I found the encaustic medium to be perfect." The retired surgeon goes on to explain that the scraping back and incising of wax layers, exposing origins and evolutionary pathways in the painting's development, reflects the scientific proliferation and regression in life itself. "The luminosity of the color and the richly textured surfaces creates myriad illusive images," stresses the artist.

Born in Long Island, New York, Levy attended University of Maryland (1962, B.A. major in art), He received his M.D. from Georgetown University School of Medicine (1966) and after 25 years in medicine and some post graduate art in New York City and Atlanta, Georgia, he returned to the art world.

West Valley Art Museum is open 10 AM to 4 PM Tuesday through Sunday. The Museum is located at West Bell Road and 114th Avenue. With five exhibition galleries, a Museum Store, *Classic Café*, and regularly scheduled education programs, the Museum welcomes all visitors. There is a small admission charge for non-members. \$7 adults, \$2 students, ages 5 and under are free.

17420 N. Avenue of the Arts, Surprise, AZ 85374

623/972-0635 Fax 623/972-0456

Website: www.wvam.org



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Top left: "Fire And Ice 2", encaustic by Art Levy Top right: "Petri Dish" encaustic by Art Levy
Bottom: "Synaptic Ballet" encaustic by Art Levy

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