

## J.R. Newton's Artist Talk provides insights into his 'Gilded Gold' exhibition at Micak Gallery



Surrounded by 12 of his latest Renaissance-Realist paintings, J.R. Newton engaged an enthusiastic gathering of more than 50 visual arts aficionados at the Micak Gallery on Thursday evening.

Newton's insights were offered in an Artist Talk supporting his 'Gilded Gold' exhibition that began on May 16 and concludes on June 13.

Gallery owner Katie Micak introduced the Orangeville-born artist and praised Newton's 'lovely paintings that have such unexpected results.'

One of the timely and controversial items discussed by Newton was the use of Artificial Intelligence in the artistic process as an imaginative friend to bounce ideas off of. AI is a beast that's coming and it's useful to make a proposal to a prospective client.

In addition to embracing AI as a small part of his process, Newton spoke about some of the recurring elements in his paintings and noted that 'many are based on moments with my wife Christina Ajdinovic who is my model and muse. She's appeared in almost 1,000 of my paintings.'

Two paintings featuring the stirring likeness of Ajdinovic were presented prominently in the 'Gilded Gold' exhibition.

'Study of Passing Time' and 'Mourning Tide' reveal Newton's potent fusion of Renaissance and Realist styles the grandeur of Italian Leonardo Da Vinci's female subjects meeting the photographically-detailed presentation methods championed by Canadian Alex Colville.

Another recurrent stylistic device that Newton discussed is his use of 'throw away areas' similar to Caravaggio reflecting the playfulness featured in his creative processes. He also acknowledged that his connection to Renaissance style, which is married to Realism in most of the paintings in the Gilded Gold exhibition, runs deeper than simply deploying the look of the sixteenth-century legendary artists.

'I'm a workhorse'I like the work ethic of Renaissance painters.'

However, Newton also admitted to feeling a connection to a famous twentieth century painter whose works are steeped in Americana: "I'm a huge Norman Rockwell fan! I love the way he composed pictures and I was moved by his narratives."

Newton described the challenges of being a painter—the toll it takes physically—peering through a series of magnifying glasses—and noted the restrictive quality of the medium in terms of how little time he has to make a first impression.

"As a painter, I have one second to catch your eye. Novelists have three hundred pages, singers have three minutes, directors have two hours."

Although the "Gilded Gold" exhibition featured many of Newton's traditional styles and subjects, the OCAD-trained painter spoke about "taking chances" at this point in his career. He directed our attention to "Soft Gravity" which is a fusion of "ballroom dancers, the 1970s paintings featured in the sitcom Good Times, and I asked myself "How do I make this Space Age?" I was painting for a different feel. I wanted to play country music, but I'm not allowed, and the Classical side took over again."

Micak reinforced the discussion about Newton's bold new painting and observed that "Soft Gravity" asks the question, "What's it like to dance in space?"

"There's such a focus on female figures from the Renaissance, but John has also just come back from seeing Degas at The Louvre and "Soft Gravity" presents an Impressionist's presentation of dance as well as a popular television show's art. There are so many connections to so many eras. Seeing the two converge—his Realism and Renaissance and embracing new technologies—seems to activate his paintings in a new way."

It's evident that Newton is embarking on a new adventure as a painter based on the startling, engaging, and boldly-colored "Soft Gravity" and he acknowledged that there are periods in an artist's life that motivate creative changes and new approaches.

"Still life was my lifeline for years as an artist. As a result, I'll never eat apples and pears again."

The gallery erupted in laughter at Newton's self-deprecating and humorous insight—sealing the deal on an evening well-spent with art lovers ranging from tweens to retirees at the Micak Gallery in Aurora.

**By Jim Stewart**