

The Artist's Almanac

January 2010

The turn of the century raises expectations. The end of a millennium promises apocalypse and revelation. But at the close of the twentieth century the golden age seems behind us, not ahead. The end game of the 1990s promises neither nirvana nor Armageddon, but entropy.

Robert Hewison, British Historian

The new decade blows in on a snowstorm and with record low temperatures. After meeting with fellow artists at Joel's studio for fried crappie and a critique of our paintings, David, Frank and I had to caravan our way back to town over solid ice at 20 mph past three cars off the road and lots of blue lights. The global warmers are in retreat. Children slide across the pond.

Forget painting in plein aire: sullen skies, wind like a knife and ground turned to mud persuade me to view landscape today from inside a warm house next to a fire dancing on my stone hearth. The mood is reflective.

Entropy, mentioned in the head note above, is a little understood scientific term defined in Webster, broadly, **as the degree of disorder or uncertainty in a system**. To experience it, turn on your television and surf channels. Alternative definitions include, **a: the degradation of the matter and energy in the universe to an ultimate state of inert uniformity** or **b: a process of degradation or running down or a trend to disorder**. Congress, for example.

The measure of entropy in a system or society is the amount of its available energy which is wasted to no useful purpose – just frittered away. If the society is closed and the energy is not replaced, the society ultimately becomes old and cold, as did Rome. Hewison is on to something.

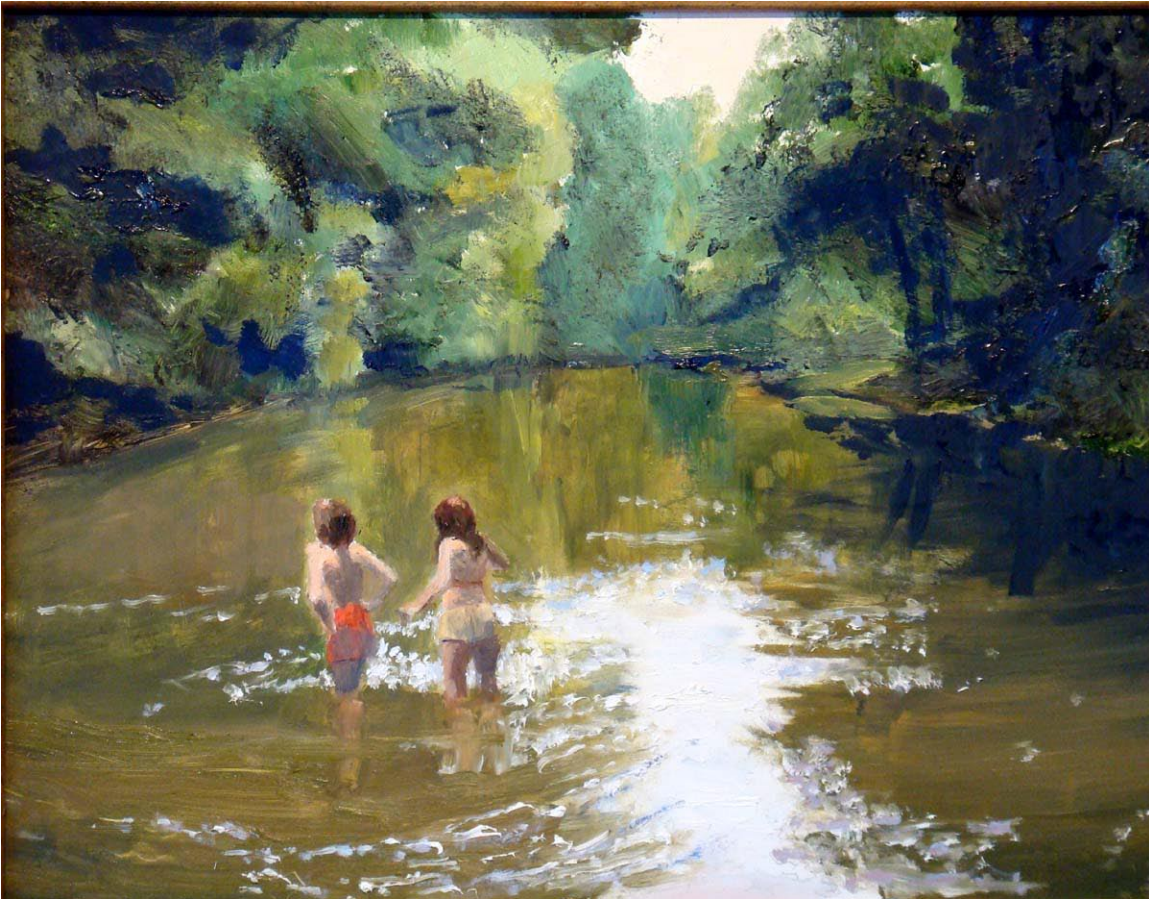
We fritter away our energy in a thousand insignificant and useless tasks – all of us do. Every January we resolve to do better – to exercise our bodies, to paint more pictures, to clear our clutter. I took a walk today. But our resolutions suffer from their own entropy and soon we descend to our old chaotic ways.

Art reacts in various ways to chaos. The ruling current fashion in modern art seems to be to celebrate chaos, while another school seeks to find meaning in it - to embed meaning within the work and challenge the viewer to twist it out, like some symbolic riddle.

I believe the true role of art is to find meaning in the world and celebrate it. The same for religion, which is why Christianity and Art are such long-time allies. El Greco manifests transcendence in the face and elongated figure of Christ while Goya's stark depictions of the evils of war are vividly vicarious.

Time seems frozen in place this cold January day, yet we know the arrow of time flies but one direction. Or do we? Scientists can tell us what time it is but not what time is. Chambers English Dictionary defines time *as a concept arising from change experienced and observed by past, present and future* – a definition that strongly promotes the idea that time is nothing but a product of the human mind.

Art stands aside and suspends time, both in its appreciation, in its subject matter, and for the passionate artist, in its creation. While theoretical physicists argue whether time in a parallel universe may flow upstream, the artist may paint the streams of his childhood and frolic in them forever.



Playing in the Creek – Bill Puryear, Artist

Venues

Art In Bloom – March 12-13, 2010, Annual show of Gallatin Junior League at Bluegrass Country Club, Hendersonville, Tennessee

Watch for program news on Tennessee Crossroads on WNPT – last week of January or first week of February.