

Long Island Academy Graduates to Next Level

By Pat Rogers

The arrival of 2008 marks an important milestone for the Long Island Academy of Fine Art. It's the year the Riverhead school has decided to put itself on the map.

January brings with it the unveiling of its new teaching staff and an exhibition, the Long Island Academy of Fine Art Faculty Show, to showcase their art at the Hampton Road Gallery in Southampton through January 31. Plus, a new portrait class will be taught at the gallery on Thursday nights.

February signals the beginning of a new semester, the first in the school's new space in Riverhead. Located a few doors down from the original headquarters, the new campus significantly expands the art school and puts it at sidewalk level on Main Street—instead of tucked upstairs in a second story office.

An opening reception at the school's new quarters will be held on Saturday, February 2, from 6 to 8 p.m. Along with food, drink and live music, free 15-minute artwork critiques will be offered. Classes begin on February 11. The new space also allows for a new art gallery for student artwork which is expected to launch soon.

For now, the Faculty Show in Southampton is the easiest way to get a peek into what the school is all about. On view are works by the four instructors: Robert Arnetta, James Albinson, Thomas J. Shelford and Bennett Vadnais.

Mr. Arnetta is the school's founder and principal instructor. He has four portraits on view at Hampton Road that demonstrate his expertise: traditional classical realism with a contemporary twist. The contemporary part is subtle—it could mean the use of non-traditional colors or hints of modern day life mixed with traditional portrait poses.

Mr. Arnetta has exhibited at the Grenning Gallery in Sag Harbor and galleries in Manhattan, including the Allen Sheppard Gallery, Arcadia Gallery, the Nabi Gallery and the National Academy of Design. He has exhibited in galleries in Philadelphia and San Francisco, among other locations.

Mr. Vadnais is exhibiting five landscapes in Southampton. The views are set in New York City but feel more bucolic than urban, a feat the artist achieves by stripping figures out of the com-

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James Albinson, left, and Robert Arnetta stand by a portrait painted by Mr. Arnetta at the Long Island Academy of Fine Art Faculty Show at the Hampton Road Gallery.

PAT ROGERS

ACADEMY: New Year Takes LIAFA To the Next Level

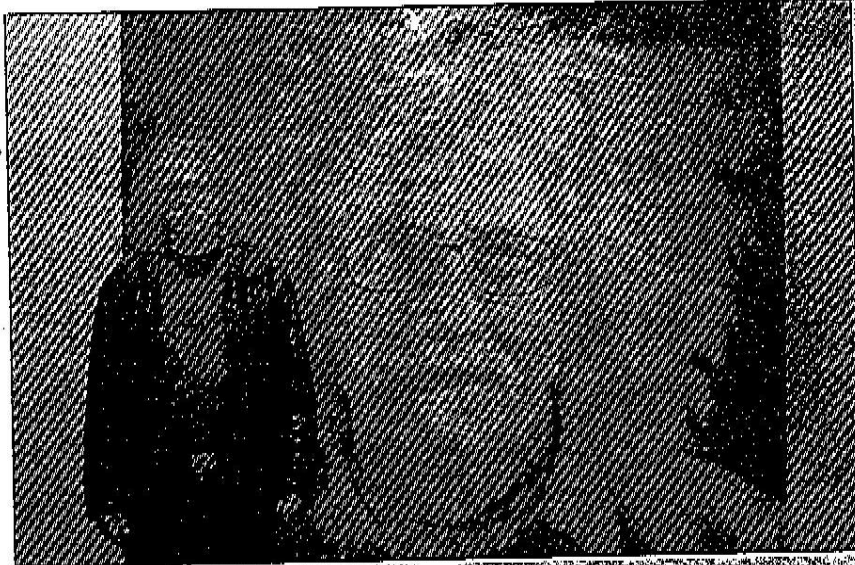
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position and combining impressionist techniques with classical realism in his paintings. He has exhibited at galleries in Texas, Virginia, Georgia and California, including the Oglethorpe University Museum of Art and the John Pence Gallery. He has had solo exhibitions at the Art Students League of New York and at Marcella Calabi in Manhattan and other galleries.

Mr. Shelford has several drawings on view. Several portraits are rendered in charcoal. Others make use of the classical technique known as grisaille, a monochromatic approach to painting and drawing typically executed in light grays or browns that was often used during the Renaissance to simulate sculpture. Mr. Shelford has exhibited at the Grenning Gallery in Sag Harbor and Applied Arts School of Visual Arts in Amagansett.

Mr. Albinson's work makes up the bulk of the exhibition. His work is split between portraits and landscapes, both reflecting his signature style, which evolved from roots in classical realism. Mr. Albinson paints under the name James Gaga. He has exhibited at the Grenning Gallery in Sag Harbor and Hampton Road Gallery in Southampton.

The Faculty Show exhibition marks significant changes for LIAFA, chief among them the addition of a teaching staff to share the workload with Mr. Armetta, who previously taught nearly all the classes. Mr. Armetta founded the school after some of his Southampton College students wanted to keep study-



David Slater stands by his portrait, painted by James Albinson, who paints under the name James Gaga.

ing with him.

The school began with a class or two and has outgrown three different locations since its founding in 2000. Mr. Armetta also teaches drawing and painting at the New York Academy of Art and the Stevenson Academy of Fine Arts in Oyster Bay. His studio is in Brooklyn, where he lives with his wife and daughter.

The second change at LIAFA is a shift in ownership—Mr. Albinson has become a business partner and is the artistic and program director for the school. He and Mr. Armetta decided to join forces in order to keep up with student demand and take the school in new directions. Mr. Armetta said the decision was an easy one after watching Mr. Albinson teach classes at the Stevenson Academy of Fine Arts in Oyster Bay. It was there that Mr. Albinson truly fell in love with teaching, and doubled student enrollment at the same time.

"He's an excellent teacher," Mr. Armet-

ta said. "He has a gift for taking the complex world of painting and drawing and breaking it into pieces and parts that are easy to understand for beginners."

When the two men started brainstorming for instructors to bring aboard, Mr. Armetta knew he wanted to work with artists who had studied classical drawing and painting, felt a true passion for teaching, and had a gift for fostering talent while setting high standards for mastering a rigorous course of study. The names of Bennett Vadnais and Thomas J. Shelford were suggested by one and known to the other, and the two were soon added to the teaching roster. Another instructor will be joining the school shortly.

Now that the first teaching team is in place, Mr. Armetta hopes to expand the school's offerings while retaining his original objectives for his students: study and master classical drawing and painting, using time-tested techniques and then learn how to make art with their own imprint.

"We treat our students as burgeoning professionals and they should be as serious about their objective as possible," Mr. Armetta said. "We will have a gallery to exhibit student works to help them get their art out into the world and experience the next step. It's a progression out into the world—the art shouldn't just sit there in their studios."

Classes at LIAFA include drawing and painting at different levels, including a new class for Young Artists from 9 to 12 years old. Some student work can be viewed in the school's online gallery. For class descriptions, schedules or other information, visit www.liafa.com or call 631-603-5514.

LIAFA is located at 127 East Main Street in Riverhead. The Long Island Academy of Fine Art Faculty Show will remain on view through January 31 at the Hampton Road Gallery, 36 Hampton Road, Southampton. The exhibition can be viewed by calling 204-9704; the gal-