

# ADDISON COUNTY INDEPENDENT

Vol. 29 No. 32

Middlebury, Vermont

Monday, November 27, 2017

40 Pages

\$1.00



## See the magic of Mozart

• “Die Zauberflote,” or “The Magic Flute,” will be telecast at THT on Saturday. See Arts Beat on Page 10 for more.

## Plane crashes on Thanksgiving eve

• A Massachusetts man with an amazing personal history lost his life on the way to see family in Starksboro. See Page 2.



## Eagle senior tops girls' soccer list

• Casey Ober earned player of the year distinction on our local all-star soccer team. See pages 20-21.

## Volunteers sleep out this weekend

• An overnight in tents in cold weather will raise funds for the John Graham Homeless Shelter. See Page 2.

## OVUU weighs its options for elementary schools

### May spread students across several towns

By LEE J. KAHR

BRANDON — A directive from the Otter Valley Unified Union School Board to level fund the next budget may result in a very different educational landscape in the Rutland Northeast Supervisory Union.

In the face of massive shortfalls caused by state funding cuts and continued falling enrollment in an aging state, RNeSU Superintendent Jeanne Collins rolled out some “Big Ideas” and presented them to the  
(See Schools, Page 29)

## Hart to lead Ilsley into new chapter

By JOHN FLOWERS

MIDDLEBURY — Dana Hart has enjoyed the bright lights and excitement of the Big Apple for the past seven years.

But she’s about to realize her longstanding dream of relocating closer to her Vermont family, thanks to her recent appointment as new director of Middlebury’s  
(See Ilsley librarian, Page 19)



MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE STUDIO art professor Jim Butler, above, looks over the boxes of found objects he has stacked in his office. The “encyclopedia” of objects has inspired and informed his work. Butler has a solo exhibit of his art at the Tibor de Nagy Gallery in New York City. Below, like other objects depicted in his current exhibition, Butler created the glass “Siren” figurine at John Chiles’ glass studio in Orwell.

Independent photo by Trent Campbell and courtesy photo

## Artist defies realism to depict an anxious world

By GAEN MURPHREE

MIDDLEBURY/SHOREHAM — “I’m searching for something that’s never been seen before,” says painter Jim Butler, of his art-making process.

For the Shoreham resident and co-chair of the Middlebury College studio art program, paintings provide a glimpse into a world that both is and is not.

Butler told the *Independent*. “I think painting is closest in spirit currently to literary fiction ... It’s the ultimate analog virtual reality, and I think that’s the purpose of fiction as well. It’s a virtual reality, and painting is that. An actual three-dimensional object is not. It is reality. So painting is really about dreams.”

“Painting is really about dreams.”

— Jim Butler

Butler’s most recent paintings,

“There’s a lot of reasons I paint,”  
(See Painter, Page 25)





# Painter

(Continued from Page 1)

now on view in the exhibit “Synaptic Reverb” at the Tibor de Nagy Gallery in New York City, present a world that seems at once almost photographically tangible and yet completely unreal. Many are huge in scale — one measures close to six feet by seven feet. Others are smaller.

Each depicts a figure or pair of figures made of glass floating eerily in space, each one so real looking you think you could reach out and touch it. A closer look reveals that the figures themselves are also distorted — some areas are pulled into hyperfocus, while others within the same field of vision are almost impossibly out of focus.

For Butler, the paintings in “Synaptic Reverb” examine “what it means to be human at a time when we’re on the precipice of technology taking us to places that are threatening and yet exciting at the same time ... I think technology is creating tremendous anxiety across the planet. It’s driving politics. It’s driving how people think about what their children’s future will be. It’s driving what you think your job might or might not be or if it will be in 10 years. It’s all of us.”

Butler gives the example of one painting in particular called “Penitent.” The painting is six foot three by four foot two. It depicts a giant blue glass figure with a massive, oversized head that’s staring downcast, as if weighted down by his own obsessive thoughts.

“He’s kind of a brainiac you know. He’s got this huge cranial structure with all this stuff going on. Someone pointed out he has a very vivid third eye,” said Butler. “We all know people who have a hyper-internal compass of self-modulation and kind of hyperactive sense of emotion related to morality.”

Behind this “brainiac” and his fellow cast of characters are a series of glass-blown objects that Butler created using the facilities at John Chiles’ Orwell glass studio, Hub Consolidated.

For Butler, these glass figures are like the apple in a traditional still life. And creating them first as actual objects, then painting them is central to his current artistic process.

Butler began working in glass in the early 2000s. At first, he said, he knew nothing about working with glass. Initially he partnered with glass artist Deborah Czeresko to make the objects. Over time he learned to make his own.

He made the glass pieces at the center of “Synaptic Reverb” in 2013, and then took several years to execute the series of paintings.

Butler said he thinks of the figurines depicted here as characters gathered around a campfire. He also created the glass campfire, which stands in his studio amongst other glass pieces, a small flickering circle. The figurines — to



SOME OF THE OBJECTS that have served as subjects of Jim Butler’s art fill shelves in his small, overflowing office.

Independent photo/Trent Campbell

use a common word for uncommon objects — are only about six to eight inches tall. You could easily hold one in your hand.

This small scale is one of the limitations of glass, Butler said. Painting allows him to take a glass object and work in a scale unimaginable with the original medium.

To explain something of his current artistic process, Butler points to a painting in the current series that’s still uncompleted. The painting is flanked on either side by two almost-mirror images. One is a small photograph of the original object, just an ordinary snapshot. The other is a layered, enlarged and much reworked version of that object, pinned up and drawn on, still being manipulated. Butler uses photography at different depths of fields to create a new image, layered on the old, that he then continues to layer with drawings and other enhancements. He photographs the image at successive stages again and again to record the new, altered object.

The results are images that seem eerily real yet defy a single pair of eyes’ point of view.

## BARBIE IN A BAG

Across his multi-decade career, Butler, 61, has painted in oils, using a near-photographic precision. But what in many of his paintings makes the viewer look and then look again, is his use of scale. He began teaching at Middlebury College in 1981, after studying painting at the Rhode Island School of Design and then at Indiana University.

His office in Middlebury’s Johnson Memorial Building is a testament to those early interests. It’s stuffed full of cast-off objects, floor to ceiling — globes, old games and puzzles, old doll houses, religious statues, stuffed deer heads, (See All kinds of objects, Page 26)



SCALE IS AN important element in Butler’s paintings. The original glass pieces Butler created are small enough to hold in your hands. This photograph of his current exhibition shows the large scale “Synaptic X-Ray” juxtaposed against two smaller paintings.

Courtesy photo



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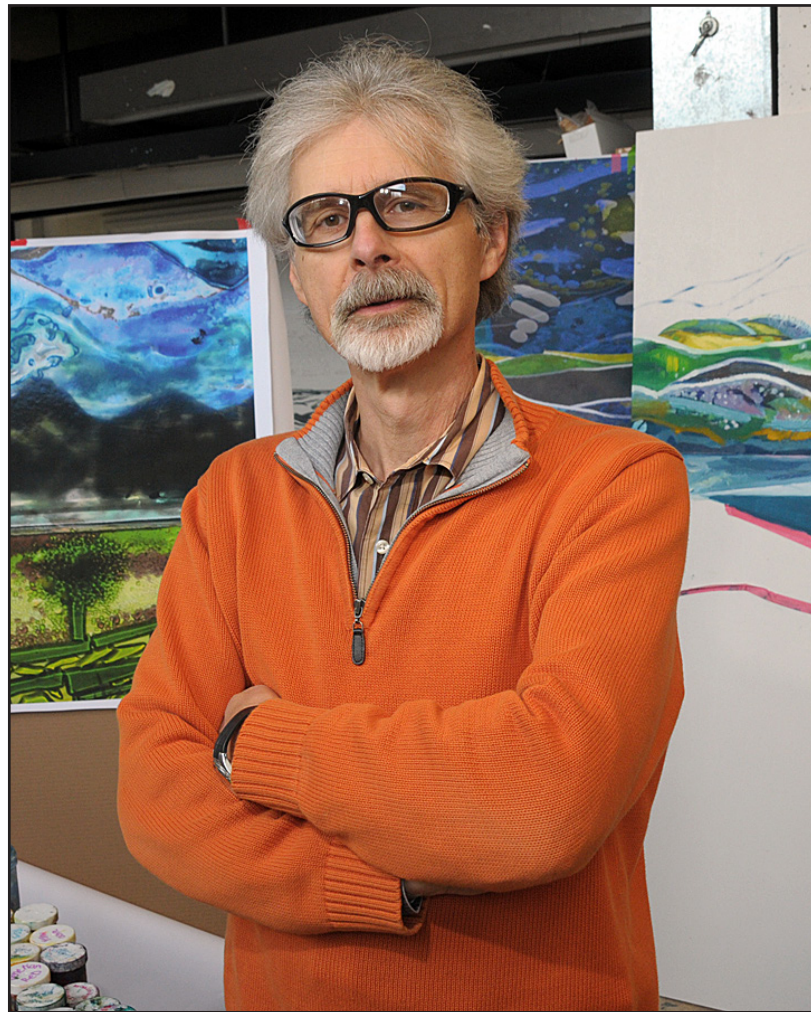


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JIM BUTLER HAS taught painting and other studio art classes at Middlebury College since 1981.

Independent photo/Trent Campbell

## All kinds of objects

*(Continued from Page 25)*

old Barbie dolls, you name it. A painting from 1993 exemplifies that earlier phase in Butler's career — and links it to his current investigations with glass. The painting "Girl in a Bag" depicts a cast-off Barbie doll in a clear plastic bag. The realism is such that you feel you could reach out to a garage sale table and pick it up. But the painting stretches 22 inches tall by a full six-feet-six inches wide.

Suddenly, the viewer is forced to see the object anew. The bagged Barbie floats against a white background, with gradations of shading. She becomes a rumination on childhoods past, lost innocence, femininity, the commodification of the female form.

The shift from painting these kinds of found Americana to painting objects he created himself began, oddly enough, when friends gave Butler a mummified cat. Not an Egyptian replica, but a real cat that had come to an unfortunate end. The cat — its form distorted through the process of mummification — is depicted in the 1997 painting "Afterlife," which measures 48 by 108 inches.

Painting the mummified cat led Butler to create sculptural objects out of plastic packaging tubes, which led to glass.

At Middlebury, Butler teaches painting, among other classes — right now he's teaching landscape painting.

Butler said he's loved the freedom that teaching has given him to explore art and art making and that working with students has

been "kind of a marvel."

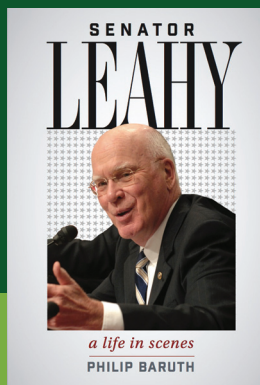
He's just been awarded a residency for next May at the Corning Museum of Glass. And it's clear he's excited at how having access to those resources will enable him to continue to expand his art.

"It's like arts studio," he said, "meets the jet propulsion lab."

Reporter Gaen Murphree is at [gaenm@addisonindependent.com](mailto:gaenm@addisonindependent.com).

## Senator Leahy: A Life in Scenes

Book lecture by Philip Baruth



Join us for a literary presentation by acclaimed author, Philip Baruth, as he presents his fascinating biography of Senator Patrick Leahy.



PHILIP BARUTH is a professor of English at the University of Vermont and served as the majority leader of the Vermont Senate from 2012–2016. An award-winning commentator for Vermont Public Radio for a dozen years, he is the author of two acclaimed novels, *The X President* and *The Brothers Boswell*.

Free and open to the public!

Friday, December 1st | 3:30 pm

RSVP: Pat Ryan, 802-388-1220, [pryan@residenceottercreek.com](mailto:pryan@residenceottercreek.com)



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