

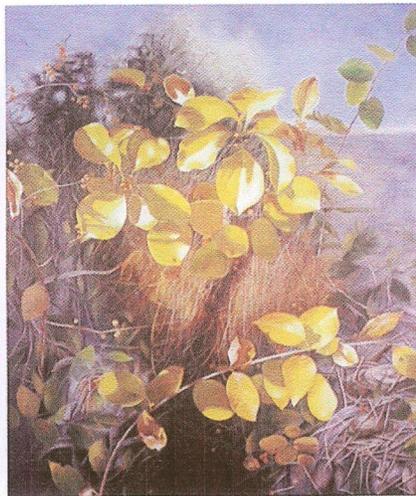
JOAN BALDWIN: PLEASANT BAY—FURNITURE AT CAPE CODKingston Gallery • Boston, MA • www.kingstongallery.com • February 3–28, 2010

In her latest oil paintings, Joan Baldwin plays with furniture in the way a child wiles away hours conjuring names and attaching human characteristics to inanimate objects. Here, Baldwin takes doll furniture, places the pieces around Cape Cod's Pleasant Bay, and captures them as they vacation.

In *Family Portrait*, four chairs, a table, a bathtub, and a toilet pose in a bramble. In *Picnic Time*, the chairs and table find a spot to rest and look out over the bay. In other paintings, viewers peer into the wilderness through the furniture's eyes; low to the ground, deep in the brush, they take in clusters of brilliant yellow-green flowers, beetles, birds, mussel shells, and gorgeous marsh views.

Judging by the three large and lush landscapes that divide the show into three groupings, the furniture must be awestruck by what they see. Each large painting offers a sun-dappled and almost too-perfect view. The eye focuses on the rich foregrounds—peach flowers twisted into dried clumps of sea grass within vibrant, green leaves. As the eye

travels farther into the painting, the focus steadily diminishes. These large views along



Joan Baldwin, *Pleasant Bay Path*, oil on linen, 60 x 51".

Pleasant Bay showcase the painter's skill and ability to control depth of field.

The smaller paintings give the artist freedom to play. While her former work as a furniture illustrator may have restricted her expression, Baldwin now enjoys her freedom to dream up personalities for her furniture and even allows them to don feathered skirts, hang from trees, and explore wooded paths.

In the center gallery, Baldwin created a concept installation around a wall mural of a wooded thicket in which a chair has settled upon a nest. In the middle of the gallery, an actual, old school chair, painted in pearlized pink and wrapped in a black feather boa, faces the mural, as if yearning to enter it, too.

Will the chair transcend? It's something viewers may contemplate; however, this question seems less significant than simply following Baldwin's lens, looking down at our feet, to a world few of us ever explore. If we did, we might be surprised at our discoveries: thorns; beetles; spiders; and, perhaps, a few bits of doll furniture. —Debbie Hagan