

Museum of Art hosts the work of Adam Straus

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Adam Straus may not be a household name such as Norman Rockwell whose paintings are on exhibit in the gallery next to Straus' work at the Vero Beach Museum of Art, but his paintings are just as conversation provoking as the well known artist.

Straus began his life on the shores of Florida in Miami Beach and is now a resident of Riverhead in Long Island, New York, with his wife Nicole and son Noah.

He is once again surrounded by the water he so loves and which is the subject of much of his body of work.

Straus is an artist with an intense social consciousness that he feels deeply but reveals subtly and communicates to the viewer with his pronounced wry sense of humor in his paintings.

His view on ecological conservation flows through much of his art but in a way that emanates from his love of the world's natural resources and not in an activist's angry embitterment. He "teaches rather than preaches" about environmental issues as he seems to express his

sadness in witnessing deforestation, the pollution of our waters and what global warming has done to his world around him.

It is easy to designate the word "realism" to the paintings of Adam Straus but that would indicate that what Straus sees, he paints. Realism as a style seems to indicate the replication of what one directly views and puts on the canvas and that is not what Straus appears to do.

It is somewhat ironic that Norman Rockwell's exhibit appears just steps away. The exhibit pairs a photograph Rockwell used as a model next to the painting he completed from the picture: complete realism.

Although Straus' paintings have the realistic imagery of a photograph, his paintings are by his own definition, "not exactly surreal, but highly representational."

Standing before his stark scenes of moving bodies of water, snow covered mountaintops and misty forests, Straus evokes deep emotional responses which varies with each individual's past experiences.

The work is at first haunting in muted tones of blue and grey but after looking

closer, one sees the nuances of hopeful colors of pink and yellow.

What one person sees as lonely and solemn, another views as peaceful and serene.

He also intersperses current bits of the commercial world into his starkly beautiful landscapes. A solitary human here: a bit of modern advertising signs there. It seems to be his take on how today is taking over the eternal natural landscape of yesterday.

Straus originally studied marine biology and mathematics but his art began with nature photography. When he was only 20 years old, he wanted to take courses in black and white photography at Miami-Dade University but all the classes were reserved for art majors.

After attending lectures on what could be done with photographs by layering shots and reworking them in the darkroom, he saw its artistry.

When he moved to Gainesville he spent hours printing and using new developing techniques and became excited by what he could do with his photos.

One of the professors, Yvonne Streetman, was so impressed with his work when he showed it to her that she helped him put together a portfolio to get into Florida State University's arts programs.

It was there that he seriously began to study art which also included

painting and sculpture.

"I stopped thinking about just making a living and went full time into art school," said Straus. "I decided I was going to do it because it was what I had to do."

At first his work in sculpture and oils was very dark with a smidgen of humor. He began to paint so that his work had more of a three-dimensional edge and then encased his work in lead because of its color sheen and the contrasting nature of the material.

"It was also very symbolic and a metaphorical contrast to the way life is a contrast between darkness and light."

Straus said that lead can have two opposite effects. "As a chemical, it is a toxic material but is also used as a barrier which guards the body against deadly radiation." Lead is dangerous but also a protector at the same time.

Many of his paintings are bordered with lead. When asked about the safety of working with such a material, Straus' inherent humor comes out.

"I have had my blood tested and I am certified as unleaded."

His highly evident humor is another unexpected aspect of Adam Straus. His work is serious and intense yet his spirit seems lighthearted and he is not only an amusing lecturer, he also

has a humorous, connection with his "family unit" that is refreshing.

Straus credits his fatherhood for bringing him back to his connection with nature and the world around him. He shares his love of the water with Noah and they spend as much time as possible on the waterways around their home.

"He is an exceptional kid—he gives me the most fun I have ever had."

Straus is also happy to see that his son is interested in the art that is his father's world. In fact, no VistaPrint for Straus—his son Noah hand designs his father's unique business cards.

"He makes incredibly wonderful creative decisions," said Straus proudly. "He sees things so differently and that is really exciting."

There is no doubt that his role as a father and husband has taken his work in a deeper direction. Because he wants to leave a better world for the next generation where Noah will live and grow, he continues to bring ecological issues to his work.

He also sees how nature and the oceans have changed in such a short time and how the dangers in the world have grown.

Straus recently painted a series of memorials to soldiers who lost their lives in the Iraq War and made them into a collage in an exhibit titled "Small Memorials for a Great Loss." "I am seeing the world from my son's eyes now."

The Adam Straus exhibit will be open at the Vero Beach Museum of Art until January 6th, 2013 and his work is also at the Nohra Haine Gallery in New York.

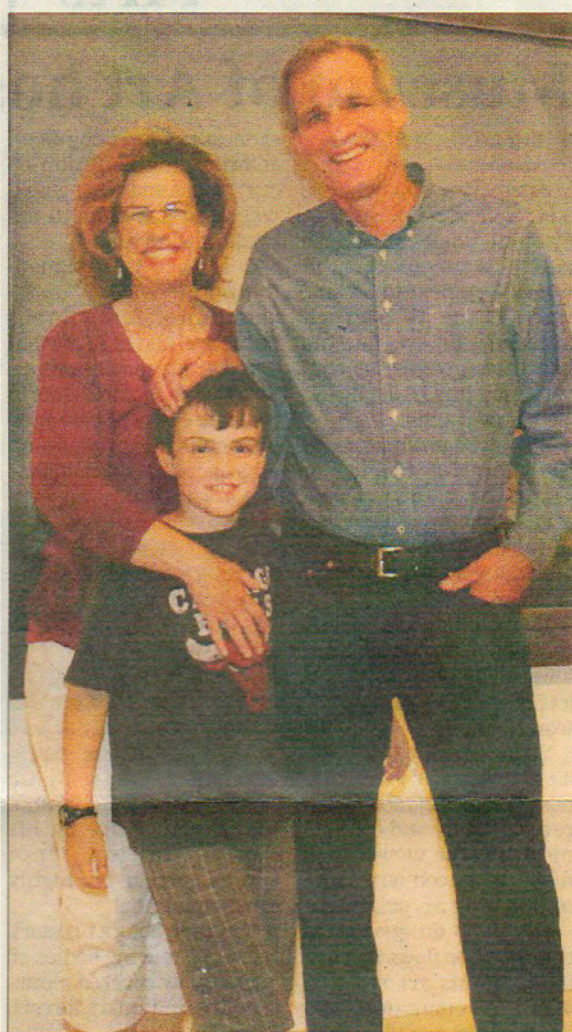


PHOTOS BY CHRISTINA TASCON

'Winter Sunset from Indian Island,' by landscape artist Adam Straus.



'The Next to Last Iceberg,' is one of Straus' paintings on exhibit.



Noah, Nicole and Adam Straus.