

COURIER LIFESTYLES

ARTS & LEISURE

An Artist At Work: Park Slope Painter Lets You In On the Creative Process

By Joe Maniscalco

Some of his paintings stretch as much as five feet high and 14 feet across.

"It's really not practical, says artist Simon Dinnerstein.

He's right. Most people just don't have that kind of wall space. But the final sale has never been Simon Dinnerstein's driving concern. And yet, the Park Slope painter has managed to keep a thriving career going for 35 years now.

At 56, the Brooklyn native might very well be at the height of his creativity. He continues to find new inspiration and still works on extraordinarily large canvases.

"I'm drawn to them," Dinnerstein says, equating the need for a large-scale painting to the desire to write a 400-page novel as opposed to a four-line poem. It often takes months for Dinnerstein to complete a single work.

But while the scale of Dinnerstein's work may be grand, his subjects remain modest. They are the stuff of ordinary lives. Simple interiors, scenes of neighborhood life and intimate nudes dominate Dinnerstein's work.

A rarity for most artists, Dinnerstein's long career is encompassed in two books, the latest published by Hudson Hills Press. Dinnerstein will lead a slide show discussion

of his work in figurative art at the Barnes & Noble at 267 Seventh Avenue on February 7, at 7:30 p.m.

"I'm a big fan of Brooklyn," says Dinnerstein. "There's a humanity and mystery that appeals to me here." But Dinnerstein's artistic vision has not been limited to his neighborhood home in Brooklyn.

He lived in Germany for a year in the early 1970's. And in 1976, Dinnerstein traveled to Italy where he studied at The American Academy in Rome for three years.

His time in Rome helped the young artist during the lean years. Dinnerstein remembers thinking at the time, "My work may not be selling, but here I am in Rome."

Today, in addition to his two books, Dinnerstein's traveling art exhibition has spent the year touring the United States. Then there's his ACR Galleries at 41 East 57th Street at Madison Avenue.

If Dinnerstein enjoys "putting a new spin on things we take for granted," the route he takes is also commonplace, and yet overlooked.

Anyone who has seen Hitchcock's 'Rear Window' will understand Dinnerstein's fascination with this voyeuristic view. The rear window plays a prominent role in

Dinnerstein works. Through it, the artist invites the viewer to take another, perhaps more intimate look at things we observe every day, but seldom really see.

So, what do you need to become a successful artist? Ask Simon Dinnerstein and he might tell you more art.

"If you read something good or listen to good music, it will help you draw better," he says. "To me the art forms are all the same."

Dinnerstein is such an avid reader and lover of literature that he likes to joke, "If there were two of me, I would have said, 'try writing.'"

But painting is a tough life. Dinnerstein admits that it does help to have "nerves of steel." Yet, even more than that, Dinnerstein, who also teaches at New York City Technical College on Jay Street, says it is the support of special people who can help sustain an artist's career.

It was Dinnerstein's wife, a kindergarten teacher, who told her husband to "go for it" when he was feeling ambivalent about undertaking another large canvas. Said Dinnerstein, "It's rare to have someone behind you like that."

Dinnerstein needs all the support he can get in a world



Night, 1985, detail

he finds growing increasingly materialistic.

"I'd like to keep on going and not be commercial," says Dinnerstein. As he's demonstrated throughout his long career, Dinnerstein wishes only to do "the work that needs to be done."

For more information on Simon Dinnerstein's slide show presentation, call Barnes & Noble at 832-9066.



Passage of the Moon, 1998, detail



The Quiet Woman, 1988, detail