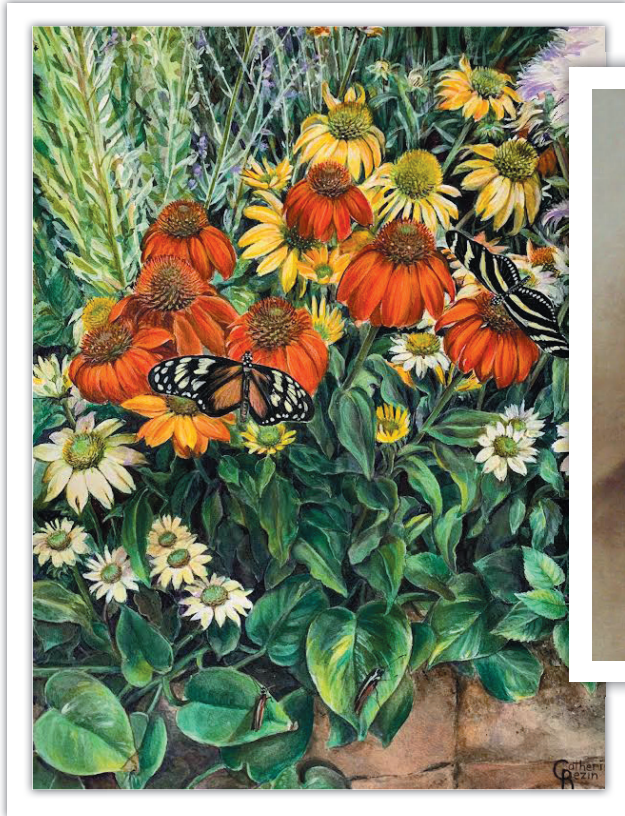


# ARTS & LIFESTYLES

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Images courtesy of STAC



Winners Showcase heads to Mills Pond Gallery ■ B13

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# Mills Pond Gallery's *Winners Showcase* spotlights local artists

BY TARA MAE

One of the most generous gifts of an artist is the ability to translate private inspiration into communal offering so that viewers experience, rather than simply assess, art.

The latest exhibit at the Mills Pond Gallery in St. James, *Winners Showcase*, features six

**ART EXHIBIT** local artists associated with the Smithtown Township Arts Council (STAC) who employ their craft as a means of communication with the world around them, enabling patrons to appreciate the simple intricacies of both everyday existence and the natural world.

On display from Jan. 28 to Feb. 24, the exhibition presents approximately 55 pieces in multiple styles by Rhoda Gordon of Port Jefferson Station, Paul Mele of Island Park, Renee Caine of Holtsville, Karin Dutra of Port Jefferson, Catherine Rezin of Nesconset, and Angela Stratton of Selden, all of whom have shown at the gallery before.

Gordon, Dutra, and Mele were winning artists from the 2022 *Winners Showcase* while Caine, Rezin, and Stratton were winning artists from the 2022 exhibit *Long Island Landscape: From Awe to Action*.

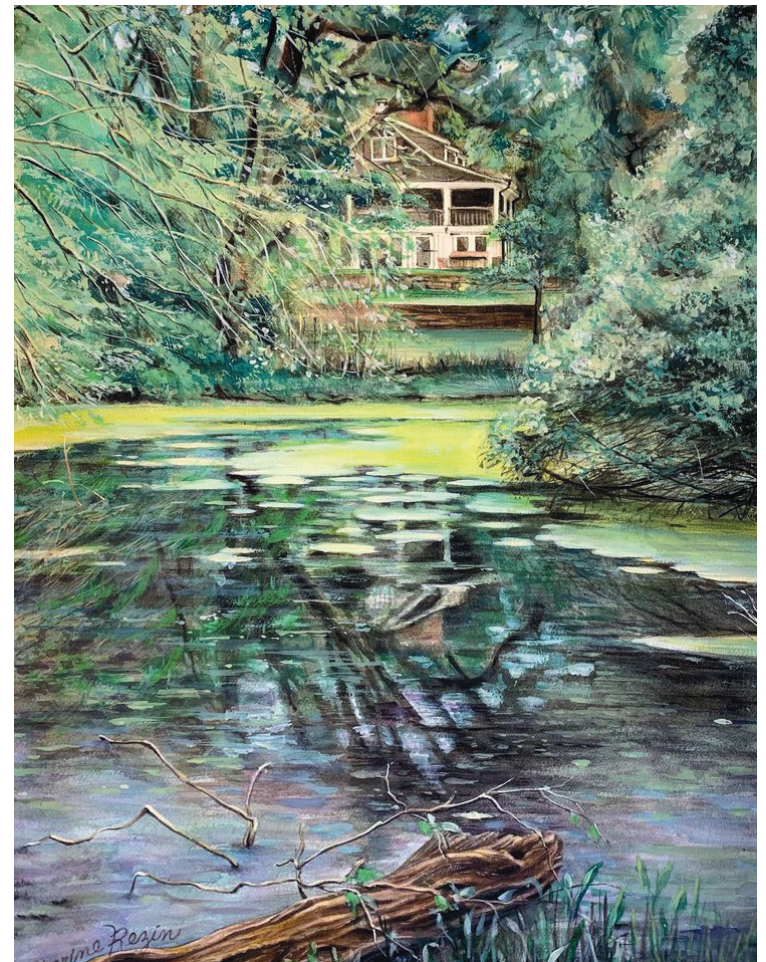
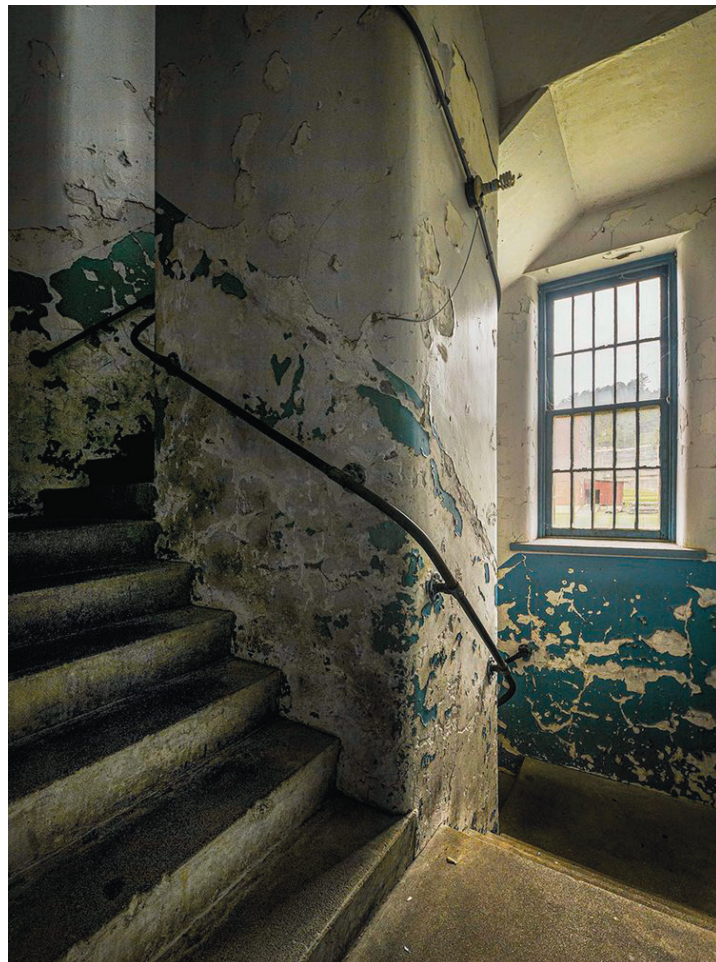
"I love the *Winners Showcase*, as it is an opportunity to see a larger body of work from each artist. It is so interesting to sometimes discover that even in works of different mediums or color palettes, a common thread connects all their work either in technique or their creative voice and what they are trying to say in their work," said Allison J. Cruz, Executive Director at the Mills Pond Gallery.

More than entertainment and aesthetics, art is an intimate conversation between creator and consumer. Featuring works in oil, acrylic, and pastel as well as photography and mixed media works in pastel and watercolor, pastel and ink, and watercolor and gouache, this exhibit is a dialogue in which the artists speak through their work.

What they choose to say is at their discretion. *Winners Showcase* has no particular theme and, once invited to participate, artists submit any pieces they choose, demonstrating a range of perspectives and portfolios.

"Even artists who I am familiar with will sometimes surprise me in a *Winners* show with a style or subject that I had no idea they pursued," Cruz added.

Divergent in style and substance, these works include abstract townscapes, reflective portraits, contemplative still life, tranquil nature scenes, and evocative photography. Not bound by an overarching topic, the art is uniquely personal and unflinchingly



From left, 'Where We Part Ways' by Paul Mele, and 'Avalon Pond' by Catherine Rezin. Images courtesy of Mills Pond Gallery

**ON THE COVER:** Clockwise from top left, 'Butterfly Exhibit' by Catherine Rezin; 'Josh Grobin' by Angela Stratton; 'Hairy Coo' by Renee Caine; 'Empty Comforts' by Paul Mele; 'Mother Nature' by Rhoda Gordon; and 'Reeds' by Karin Dutra

universal. It encompasses the whimsical and wondrous, the pastoral and pensive.

Paul Mele's photography series *Confinement*, chronicling his grueling years' long recovery from a car accident, explores dark, seemingly abandoned spaces that nonetheless offer a hint of relief, from a door ajar or a window that permits stubbornly optimistic sunlight to stream inside.

"I kind of feel my work balances between a positive and negative, light and dark. I tend to be drawn to images that are more dark, but there is a lighter overtone in my work," said photographer Paul Mele. "This is the most personal thing I have ever done."

Hope is perhaps the component that appears in each print and on every canvas throughout the show: hope for a brighter future, hope to be understood. In subdued tones and vivacious palettes, realistic renderings and abstract observations, this ambition transcends from artists to audiences.

Sharing art is an inherently brave act, making one vulnerable to public consumption while seeking understanding from those who observe and perhaps,

admire. "It is nice when people see your work, relate to it, and appreciate it for it is," Mele said.

Catherine Rezin, a multi-genre artist, shares this sentiment, and views art as a means to forge a benevolent connection.

"In general, I want to portray the positive feeling I have of the subject to my viewer," she said.

Through strokes of watercolor and gouache paints, this attitude is revealed in her vibrant vistas, lush landscape, and affectionate portraits alike. She began exhibiting her art three years ago, after retiring from her career as a commercial artist.

"I am now enjoying creating art for the love of it," she added.

Such passion is evident throughout *Winners Showcase*, a celebration of the courage of creation and ecstasy of expression.

The public is invited to an opening reception on Saturday, Jan. 28 from 1 to 4 p.m. to meet the exhibiting artists and view their work.

Mills Pond Gallery is located at 660 Route 25A, Saint James. Hours of operation are Wednesdays to Fridays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and weekends from noon to 4 p.m.

For more information, call 631-862-6575 or visit [www.millspondgallery.org](http://www.millspondgallery.org).

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