

BENNETT VADNAIS

Baltimore Revealed

Bennett Vadnais approaches the streets of Baltimore as masses of forms that he captures in often-monochromatic sketches that serve as his references back in the studio. If he remains unsure of a particular detail or light condition, he will return to the site at the same time of day to experience it again.

When he painted in New York, his subjects were far away, but in Baltimore his access to the buildings is more intimate. His skies are featureless to bring more attention to the light on the structures themselves. In his painting *Brewers Hill*, the buildings are massed against the sky as shadows begin to work their way up their sides. The shadows give him the opportunity to portray the shifts in color that occur as the light recedes.

The painting is acrylic on panel, with acrylic paint applied as if it were egg tempera, in short strokes. "Instead of mixing the color on the palette," he explains, "I rely on optical mixtures by placing the colors next to each other. I will glaze a warm color over the gray underpainting and scumble white over that. It gives opalescence to the colors and a

soft diffused light over the surface." Like a tempera painter, he makes his own paint from powdered pigments.

Brewers Hill can be seen in an exhibition of his recent work at George Billis Gallery in New York (February 28 through April 18).

In *The Little House*, he uses a wide-angle effect to get more of the scene into his composition while creating a distorted perspective. The subtle effects of light and shadow animate the surface—a shaft of light crosses a window on the house on the right and illuminates the porch of the little house in the middle, casting shadows on the porch of the next house.

The often humble or industrial subjects of his paintings reveal their beauty with his masterful handling of light and texture. Degas said, "Art is not what you see, but what you make others see." Vadnais sees in a way and paints in a way that allows the viewer to see the extraordinary in the ordinary. ●

George Billis Gallery 525 W. 26th Street, Ground Floor - New York, NY 10001 • (212) 645 2621 • www.georgebillis.com

1 *Brewers Hill*, acrylic on panel, 15 x 23½"

2 *The Little House*, acrylic on panel, 32 x 43"

3 *Church*, acrylic on panel, 30 x 98"

4 Bennett Vadnais works on his painting *Church*.

