The Photographic Appeal of Horsebarn Hill



Postcards and calendars on sale at Milton Levin's Gallery Talk at The William Benton Museum of Art on March 1, 2026.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MADISON HENDRICKS, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER/THE DAILY CAMPUS

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If you've seen any breathtaking photographs of the sunsets at the University of Connecticut's Horsebarn Hill, full of explosive oranges or free-flowing purples, there's a good chance it was taken by Milton Levin.

Levin, an associate professor at UConn in the pathobiology and veterinary sciences department, spoke at the William Benton Museum of Art for an event called "It's Different Every Day: Horsebarn Hill" on Sunday, March 1. Levin's talk went into his journey and highlights of photographing Horsebarn Hill.

Levin began by explaining his introduction to UConn and photography. He came to UConn as a PhD student in 1999, and he said his interest in photography was still casual at that point.

While Levin gradually spent more time with photography, switching from point-and-shoot cameras to GoPro models and starting drone photography in 2015, it was not until 2019 when he took photography more seriously, he said. At the encouragement of his brother, he purchased a professional camera and started using Horsebarn Hill as a testing ground, where he took advantage of anything that looked compelling.

"I don't really consider myself a wildlife photographer or a landscape [photographer], I just shoot whatever's in front of me," Levin said. "Whatever's most interesting, it can be a leaf, it can be a cow, it can be a coyote."

Once the COVID-19 pandemic happened, Levin had reduced access to his lab and research, which focuses on the effect on environmental pollutants on marine mammals. But the extra time gave him the opportunity to visit the hill daily for sunrises and sunsets, which became an everyday routine, he said. Since he lives near the hill, it was an easy destination for him to travel to.

Levin said that as he improved his photography, he started gaining interest in it as a career. But he wanted to continue his research as well.

"I can't get into my lab, but I'm now discovering photography, and I'm kind of struggling," Levin said. "It was a very, very late mid-life crisis. I don't want to leave the pursuit of photography as a career, or do I want to stay a scientist?"

Levin came to the conclusion that he could be a scientist and photographer at the same time. He said his process to science mirrors his approach to photography, with the hypothesis stage of research aligning with planning photography shoots and collecting data matching with taking photos.

While out shooting, Levin said he never runs out of things to photograph and that it is always important to "turn around" because "you never know what you're gonna see."

After discussing his introduction to photography, Levin took the audience on a visual journey with a slideshow focusing on different photographic aspects of Horsebarn Hill. He showcased dozens of photos with varied themes. Many included the recognizable Jacobson Barn that sits near the base of the hill, while others focused more on various sky phenomena, like sunsets, moonrises, lightning storms and comets.

One of the things Levin said he tries to do is make each photo of the area stand out, even though he takes so many pictures of the area. In 2025 alone, he ended up taking over 162,000 photos. He used composition and changes in seasons, weather and the sky to make things like the Jacobson Barn and the local water towers feel entirely different from photo to photo.

"What I like about art is when I take a picture, I always try to, as best I can, give it location so you know where the picture was taken," Levin said.

Levin also shared a variety of wildlife photographs he took at Horsebarn Hill. He showed off bobcats hunting, coyotes howling, birds of prey flying and more, all animals he found around the hill, often around sunrise.

"We have a free safari in our backyard," Levin said.

One of the less shared uses of Levin's photography is for his research work. He said he uses pictures to capture the processes of his field work with marine mammals and communicate its importance to other scientists.

Levin finished by sharing his favorite photograph, which captured three polar bears on an iceberg while he was doing research in Greenland. He took the photo with a simple camera in 2011, before he was a serious photographer, and said it was not even that great of a photo.

"It's old, it's not great, it's not sharp, but that photo transports me there," Levin said.

Levin said he always tries to capture that same feeling with his photography now, whether at Horsebarn Hill or somewhere else.

Scott Lehmann, a Mansfield resident and professor emeritus in philosophy at UConn, said he came to Levin's talk because of his interest in photography.

He said he was impressed by Levin's ability to capture fleeting moments of things like eclipses and lightning storms.

"I always wondered how to do those because if you try to capture them and the lens isn't on the right shutter, it's gone half a second before you can shoot it," Lehmann said. "So it's fascinating to see things like that and to realize that, well, if you put in the time to do it, you can probably learn to do this too."

Jennifer Kaufman, a Mansfield resident and the town's director of planning and development, said she often runs into Levin while walking with friends in the morning.

She said she appreciated Levin's work and has had him take photos of local parks for the town.

"He's always watching and observing," Kaufman said. "He has to be really present when he's taking those photos."

Levin's talk was hosted in conjunction with the Benton exhibit, "Raid the Archive: New Eyes on Horsebarn Hill," which features graduate art projects focused on Horsebarn Hill and archival materials.



Milton Levin discusses his background in photography at his talk at William Benton Museum of Art on March 1, 2026. Many gathered to hear about the Horsebarn Hill photographer's photos.

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