

Acts of creativity are extremely important. They are transformative. One could say they are revolutionary. This is true even if they are made only with the intent of transforming oneself, and even in the smallest way. Sending results of creative acts out into the world represents courage and hope. With this in mind, I want to thank and congratulate everyone who submitted their work to the Mercer County Artists 2017. As a fellow artist, I want to encourage you all to keep following the impulse to make your work, in whatever form that takes.

For me, acting as a juror means less a process of “accepting and rejecting” and more about highlighting various qualities and tendencies I see among the work I am presented. As an artist I consider it a responsibility to challenge myself to look beyond my own personal aesthetic and open myself up to quality coming from all kinds of styles. In the end my goal was to make a selection of work that would appropriately occupy the gallery space in a way that felt reflective of the myriad directions submitted overall, while giving each included work a nice amount of space in which to be seen fully.

At the most basic level, when I look at any art, I’m holding out feelers for jolts of compelling visual energy that make me want to engage the piece more. These kinds of jolts come from all over in this show. I hope and expect there’s work in this show by beginners all the way to old academy-trained hands! There are strains of emphatic color, such as in the abstractions of Meredith Remz and Andrew Werth and representational works like those by Larry Chestnut and (in more of an “emphatic whisper”) by Lea Novak. I found that I also gravitated to bold design/compositional approaches, such as what one sees in the work by Joseph H. Dougherty, the two black and white works by Libby Ramage and the subway love scene by Ryan Vogen. Then there are a few pieces that take a minute to unfold in idea or narrative (or both), and present more questions than answers, like Salvatore Damiano’s bathing scene and Concetta Maglione’s “Announcement,” a painting which is conceptually much larger than it’s diminutive size. Harmonious visual order is a high-priority in my own work, so naturally I gravitated to the mixed-media construction of Philip Cox Luth and the beautiful turned wooden bowl by Michael Pietras. And, let’s not take for granted the pleasure factor. Sometimes something quite direct, simple and lovely can communicate clearly in a way something “high-minded” does not. In this way, enjoy Jenny Sweetland’s doughnuts and the vitality of what looks to be a quick and perceptive line drawing by Yijay Sawant.

I chose James Doherty’s mysterious portrait as the Best In Show because it precariously balances so many of the qualities I described above. It’s a no-nonsense composition, nearly symmetrical. A figure in the middle. It’s so basic it’s almost “in your face” in that way. Except that it can’t be. The face of the subject is turned away from you. (I was reminded of Gerhard Richter’s similar approach in his 1988 painting “Portrait of Betty.”) Upon first take, the image is silvery/grey. On closer inspection one sees palette-knife strokes of a variety of color, more chromatic than you expect. These strokes look like they were laid down with a high degree of confidence (like drawing actions), but what is the intent? To obscure the image, reflective of memories fading over time? Or to caress the surface, like the act of stroking a child’s head? Doherty’s hard panel substrate allows for a quick/slick approach to the paint that is counteracted by the soft delightful feel of light falling on the braids of the subject’s hair. The final

compelling quality I find in this image is the degree to which it represents the entire process of making a single painting, with its thicker areas in the upper portion of the painting, all the way down to the visibility of the primed panel at the bottom edge, with initial pencil marks seeking out a course.

Thank you again for allowing me the opportunity to engage with your artworks.

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