

Image & Imagination: Anne Arundel County Juried Exhibition

It must take an incredible leap of faith to contemplate a blank canvas, paper or other visual media while preparing to render an image or idea in the mind's eye. Artists are visual poets and we are fortunate to enjoy the products of their efforts which enrich our experience and encourage us to think differently about our world and where we fit within it.

I was honored to serve as juror for the Mitchell Gallery's biannual *Image & Imagination* exhibition celebrating the great artistic talent of the Anne Arundel community. It has been a privilege to view and assess a dazzling array of submissions in all variety of media. Choosing three award winners was extremely challenging, but ultimately I went with what spoke to me on something of a spiritual level. As Best in Show, Sally Wern Comport's beautifully drawn illustration *Harriet Tubman, Song of Freedom* speaks to social issues we must confront on a daily basis. It portrays the bravery and strength of Harriet Tubman, the heroic escaped slave who helped so many others through the covert network known as the Underground Railroad. Comport was commissioned to paint murals for the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Historical Park in Church Creek, Maryland, where one can see this scene on a large scale as part of the narrative of Tubman's life.

To recognize the outstanding photographic submissions I selected a digital print for Best Two-Dimensional prize. The prismatic, *A Starry Night* by John T. Hanou resonated with me. Here, stars appear in the form of watery droplets among a framework that suggests a magnified view of organic matter. In titling this work after the iconic painting by Van Gogh, the artist draws some interesting parallels. Hanou began his photographic work in 1971 and has found ways to dynamically expand the camera's effects through digital "darkroom" manipulation. As explained on his web page: "I try to capture the world as we know it, and offer it in a manner we have not thought of."

The choice for Best Three-Dimensional work, *De Divina Proportione* by Eddie Lavin is from the aptly named series *Transcendance*. As an avid fan of Italian Renaissance art, I was drawn to the figure emerging from the unblemished surface of the cold and beautiful marble like a living being. Lavin works in pure marble mined in Italy, perhaps the most beautiful medium for its purity and surface smoothness. His title is taken from Pico della Mirandola's 1486 *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, a key treatise of Renaissance Humanism, vastly influential to giants like Raphael and Michelangelo. Lavin's idealized form reflects the proportions delineated in della Mirandola's writings.

The scope of *Image & Imagination* includes works that fall within four basic genres: landscape or nature, still-life, portraiture or figural, and abstraction. These are presented in a wide variety of media and artistic perspectives. It's a great opportunity to see how varied approaches interact with one another revealing multiple layers of perception, effectively channeling a visual dialog. Among the technical tours de force is Deborah Kommalan's still-life *Wasted*, depicting an overturned glass with amber liquid and ice cubes splashing out of the picture plane, seemingly aimed toward the viewer. This is a masterful *trompe l'oeil* (literally meaning to fool the eye), a genre introduced and perfected by Dutch and Italian Old Master painters. In the same tradition is the assemblage of pop culture snack foods, candy, cigars and whiskey expertly rendered in Mary Ellen Geissenhainer's drawing *Bob's Provisions*. The charming *Pottery and Chinese Lanterns* painted by Nancy McCarra recalls works by William Merritt Chase recently exhibited at the Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C. Both are inspired by Asian aesthetics and effectively use color to accent smaller objects. The sense of quietude in these carefully arranged still-lives imparts serenity. Some of them might tempt the viewer to reach in and handle the inanimate objects.

Among the many lovely landscape views, Rick Schimpf's *Annapolis Snow Day* uses perspective to effectively draw the eye towards the steeple of St. Anne's Episcopal Church in the heart of Annapolis. This has appeal for locals and visitors alike. Mike Thorpe's *Clouds and Steam* is an arresting photograph of a classic, steam-powered locomotive. The heavy cloud cover seamlessly merges with the smoke from the engine, dominating the scene. The absence of color is the perfect choice for this mechanical subject which imparts the expansionist vision of 19th century America. Technical control as well as a unique approach to landscape combine in Janice Hendra's *Ancestral*, a compelling blend of representation and abstraction. The high horizon line with shapes of houses floats above a flattened foreground with stenciled circles.

There are some eloquent portraits in this show. Sandra Cohen, Harry Lloyd Jaecks, and Andree Tullier are impressive draftsmen of the human form. Possibly the most challenging of genres, portraits are most successful when they reveal some aspect of personality rather than a strictly mirror image. In Cohen's *Golden Shawl*, a wistful young lady gazes into the distance, deep in thought. Jaecks' *Deadrise Captain*, a masterful half-figure, appears focused and listening, while Tullier's pastel, *Gabriel*, captures an enigmatic expression on a sensitive youth. Also in the figural category, Kathy Daywalt's lighthearted and joy-filled watercolor *Lucent Dream* is a decorative approach combining shapes and patterns in a palette of blue and gold. The woman in blue merges with the swirls and discs of the background in an effect evocative of Art Nouveau master Gustave Klimt.

Non-objective works which address composition, balance and color can be universal in appeal. Martin Beadle's engaging mixed media *Assembly* presents four rows of brightly colored fibers dangling from horizontal twigs. This assemblage of color dances in front of a woven background of thin vertical strands. In her photograph *Swirling Paper*, Tara Clifford creates a fascinating arrangement of circular forms flowing across the surface in hypnotic, undulating waves. Among the few artists working in traditional printmaking, Mark Lindley's lithograph *Pilgrimage* is a stand-out. His calligraphic black lines seem to contain countless human figures layered with patches of soft color in a mid-century modernist ethic.

Ingenuity and imagination are foremost in several of the three-dimensional works. As a curator employed in a library setting, I responded to Kass McGowan's multi-media made from found objects. The tribute to *Eleanor Roosevelt*, combines pages from an encyclopedia book-ended by a pair of carved architectural forms. Cindy Winnick's *Ruby Burlesque* is a whimsical mannequin wearing a red feathered boa perched casually on a stool, one leg crossed over the other. I was compelled to wonder: is she a parody or a celebration of individuality?

There are eighty-three artists represented in this exhibition and I want to congratulate them and thank the staff of the Mitchell Gallery, especially director Hydee Schaller, art educator Lucinda Edinberg, and preparator Neal Falanga, for pulling together this expansive and ambitious show. We're excited to present this selection of the area's finest artists and artworks. Theirs is a calling that is deserving of recognition and support. I hope visitors will be attracted by the variety of imagery and media to return and discover many more wonders than could be included in this appraisal.

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