

thoughts on the Exhibition

“ Studio Montclair’s annual exhibition “**ViewPoints**” does not disappoint. With over 70 artists and artworks selected from hundreds of talented entries, a high level of skill and innovation is on display. The works in the exhibition are merely a slice of the vast ways artists are telling the story of what it means to be human in the 21st century. Primarily told through painting, photography, and collage, they cover themes of nature, transformation, joy, and death. Replete with skill and exciting techniques, this was a difficult group of works to jury. Congratulations to the prize winners, all the artists in the exhibition, and to the many artists who continue to participate in this extraordinary event.

Artists are finding inspiration in the domestic sphere, in innovative portraits, and in the beauty of decay. Together the works create a snapshot of the celebration of life that endures. The standouts are portraits of transformation as in “Shaman” by Barbara Novak, an oil painting on canvas that at first glance looks like a straightforward depiction of a young person, but blossoms before our eyes with the iconography of life, death, coming of age, and gender. We are privy to another transformation of self in the stunning backstage scene of “Madame Vivien V” by Janet Boltax. And in “The Woman with the Red Dress” by Paulina Olivares, identity hides and undulates in the alluring color and patterns of culture.

Honorable mentions goes to portraits of another type- “Roots?” by Alison Deas, which comes from a series of collages where history is told through the forms of houses. Also “Glass Block 12”, a magical trompe l’oeil on shaped aluminum by Jean-Paul Picard. And “Finding the Time”, an abstract drawing that may be a body or boat, with elegant symbols that simmer on Japanese patterned paper with encaustic and oil stick by Francesca Azzara.

Look further at the portraits that capture unusual perspectives - upside down as in “Numb” by Samantha Brown, from below “Liberty at Moonlight” by Linda Johns; surrounded by text as in a beautiful set of prints – “Chain Gangs” and “Middle Passage” by Chuck Miley; catch a colorful camouflage silhouette “Zora” - a reference to writer Zora Neale Hurston by Antoinette Ellis-Williams; a self-portrait in double “Amor Propio” by Patricia Patzi; and one in triple with Jamaican runners at the finish line by Steven Ellis.

The domestic sphere abounds with references to rooms- empty with “Bed” (Merrie Koehlert), with human and pets “Mary in Bed” (Dennis Murray), from heart-shaped houses “Tristan und Isolde” (Wade Miller), a tiny house under “Massive Storm Over The Atlantic” (Katharine Philip); from houses that may be for birds “Blocked” and “Obstructed” (Linda

Brooks Hirschman), and in a complex of apartments made of boxes “Isolated I, II, III” (Pam Cooper) -referencing children in isolation during COVID.

The beauty of decay is brought into view through a photograph of a beloved truck “End of the Road” (Dave Magyar), an abandoned “Officers Row Staircase”, perhaps seen through a rose-colored lens (Steven Meko), through elegant “Butter Knives” from a bygone era, photographed before they were melted down for cash (Beth Burstein), metal scraps repurposed into dancing statues “Rt. 21 Kami 8.5” (Patrick McCoy), and “Duck Bills” an ingenious photographic perspective of stacked metals parts (Patrick Binns), are just a few examples.

There are many gems for thought running through the works in this exhibition, and the conversations between them will be great and expanding. I am honored to have the opportunity to participate in the production of Viewpoints 2023 and look forward to revisiting the artworks in the gallery. Bravo to the Studio Montclair organizers.



—Diedra Harris-Kelley, 2023 Juror