

Discussions with Artists - The LGAA Open Juried Show 2007



The recent Los Gatos Art Association Open Juried Show featured a wide array of local art noteworthy for both its quality and range of expression. Juror Marian Parmenter, SFMOMA's Artist Gallery at Fort Mason Center Director selected over 48 works by LGAA members (out of 112 exhibited) for display in the show at the Los Gatos Museum of Art.

The Palette's Kevin Kasik interviewed the following award winning artists (all except Robin McCloskey are LGAA members) to glean an idea of their inspiration behind their art. We also wanted to hear their responses to Juror Parmenter's evocative comments about why she chose these specific pieces for awards.



Marina Povalishina. First place - Painting, Figurative/Animal, *Two*, Oil



Juror's comment: *So beautifully painted, wonderful quality and emotion. Reminiscent of Italian painting.*

Marina's response: I am impressed with the Renaissance and the old masters, such as Giotto and Van Eyke. They painted so simple and wise- it's attractive to me, this combination of sincerity and wisdom. But I try to do people who are not attached to concrete time or space; just human beings.

I prefer warm colors- it's hard for me to paint with cold blues and such; maybe that's why the juror said my art is Italianate, for me it's hard to see cold colors as being Italian!

Q: So what about those hats?

A: I painted the figures in hats to connect them. It's just from my imagination. I think about the two figures as friends, looking at something together, trying on hats, perhaps. They're getting joy from looking at something together.

I'm Russian you know, and I remember as students my friend and I loved to go to the department store and try on hats. It was very fun for us, being just 15-year old girls (laughs.) But this painting isn't specifically about that; it's just a happy painting. It is just about 'two' enjoying life.

Toni Ellis. First place - Painting, Still Life/Floral, *Peaches in a Black Bowl*, Oil



Juror's comment: *Beautiful. Reminiscent of Jean-Baptiste Simeon Chardin”*

Toni's response: I greatly admire Chardin, so it's an honor, but I'm nowhere close to him. My goal was a strong, simple composition. I wanted the painting mostly dark with just the peaches popping out, more vibrant. When I think of Chardin, he has more objects and is more tonalist, his color scheme more muted. Again, the Chardin comparison is a great honor, but I actually admire Claudio Bravo, a still living Brazilian artist. I love his work and have gotten a lot of inspiration from him.

Editor's note: Please note that in the picture above, ambient light in the gallery caused the gauzy highlight seen in the upper portion of Toni's painting.

Willard Beeskow. First place – Painting, Abstract/Experimental, *Green Precision*, Acrylic



Juror's comment: *Classic and elegant painting. An homage to its antecedents.*

Willard's response: I started painting 15 years ago, but being older I already had some tastes set. Honestly, I've never done any representational painting. When I go to a museum, the abstract area is where I go first. So for me it's been a consistent progression, although not the same style surely; I've got to change course with the trends. But I always just paint what I like.

I think the best abstract art was produced in the 1930's, 1940's and into the 1950's, before Abstract Expressionism. Abstract art in that period was termed Concrete, where the painting is the thing, and when you look at the painting you don't think about something else.

My favorite artists from that period were Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee and Joan Miro. Kandinsky said that the purpose of abstract art was to raise the tone of the

mind. It's spiritual not political. I think of it that way, as something uplifting -the way you think of music. It's like a separate world, though not escapism. It's elevating yourself and bringing yourself into a state where 'being' is better. It's abstract like when you listen to Bach for instance, and you are listening but not specifically for mockingbirds or waterfalls or anything like that. So non-figurative painting is just like music which draws out a feeling which isn't the normal feeling you associate with, happiness or sadness or sense of loss or whatever, but some other kind of abstract, free flowing feeling that you have. That's what I try for when I paint. I try to avoid external references.

Q: In regard to the story about Kandinsky, who is said to have discovered abstraction one day upon seeing one of his paintings on its side in a dimly lit room –think it's true?

A: I'm sure it is because if you look at the same shapes from a different point of view when they are no longer trees or houses or a cow, they become abstract shapes. You see the beauty of them in and of themselves, as well as how they relate in harmonious arrangements. There was such resistance to painting abstractly at that time (in the early 1900's) and he was a professional already having a successful career as a representational artist, so I believe he was forced to go more and more abstract because of an inner drive which finally had to come out. Nowadays, abstract art is not as popular as other types but it's not nearly the journey into the strange and bizarre or unknown, as it was in his day!

Robin McCloskey. First place - Printmaking, *Baylands # 4*, Photo-etching/Monotype



Juror's comment: *Technically complex, important and beautiful image speaking about the earth today.*

Robin's response: I'm really happy she recognized those qualities in my work. The first part of this print I did was the below-ground part. I built that in the back yard out of mud and sticks, carved out little cubbies and put the objects in the cubbies and photographed it. Those are some of my own family history because they're my grandmother's glasses and coffee can, and my son Isaac's softball.

But I felt like I wanted another aspect to it, the concept of above ground as well as underground, so I included the picture of the baylands above. I'm thinking that the places where we live and walk have a history and you peel back the layers to reveal that history.

Q: So why did you include what looks like an astronomical chart in the sky portion?

A: The chart in the sky above the baylands I photocopied. It's a chart of the days of the

week and hours of the day, and it kind of swirls around in a way to represent time and time passing. So there are many things that refer to time in the piece, like the underground components could be examples of archeological time.

I love the baylands. We live a minute away from the bay and often walk there. It's a very interesting environment because it is both natural and heavily, heavily manipulated and impinged upon by human activity. Yet it's still possible to see thousands of birds there. It remains a viable habitat yet, but fragile; it easily could go the other way.

Latino Torelli. Third place – Painting, Landscape, *The Columbia River at the Bridge of 97*, Oil



Juror's comment: *This is a very serious painter doing something difficult. It has a wonderful abstract quality. The thin paint is light and casual with a style that looks effortless.*

Latino's response: -How do I respond to the juror calling me a serious painter? –I guess that's the best part of it. I just think of myself as a guy who paints, not a painter. After this prize, maybe they can call me a painter (laughs).

I painted first the upper part, then the foreground –I wasn't sure how to do that. Then I took a large brush, with yellow, then just a few strokes for the light area, and finished in 15 minutes.

I try not to want anything when I paint. I just want to paint, is all. I try not to have intention. The more you have an intention, the more you want to paint good, the worse you paint. Painting is often a sort of summation of accidents, something good, something bad- and sometimes it comes out well.

Q: So describe your style

A: I think I have a tonal sensitivity. The only thing is it must be coherent, always coherent. Say you have a green on the canvas and you need to make it more light. If pink is on the palette, you add it in. It's okay-so long as it never gets dirty. I paint rapidly on purpose – I cannot stand the tension more than two hours. When I'm done with that one, I never put my brush on it again. Never on a dry surface; only in the moment, wet into wet.

To me, it's something like living existentially. Some young guy asked me – what is your painting about? I tell him I'm painting my being there, just being there. When you're somewhere painting, what you see makes you live, and you make live what you see!

Deborah Matlack. Third Place – Painting, Figurative/Animal, *Justine*, Pastel



Editor's question: So who is 'Justine'?

Deborah's answer: Justine is the daughter of a friend of a friend. I was struck by something in her face.

There really should be two signatures on this painting; I actually never saw her in person. My friend took the photograph and gave the photograph to me because he found it very special. I agreed.

One day I wanted to try this new piece of art paper, velour. I wondered to myself what would be a good subject for velour - and decided a soft paper should have something soft and gentle on it. So I chose this photo, even though I work from life about 99% of the time.

Q: Was the photograph as dramatically cropped as your painting? I think it's quite compelling in its composition.

A: No, because some of the things that were in the photograph would not have translated well into the painting. It was a matter of compositional choice. In fact, the active background in the pastel you complimented me on is there in place of subject matter I omitted. If you work from a photograph you do just as you do in real life; you take certain liberties which you think will present a good composition and tell the story you want to tell. I wanted to remove everything else from the viewer's eye except the face.

Q: How much of an influence is a female artist like Mary Cassatt to you?

A; Mary Cassatt is a goddess. She and Cecilia Beaux are both artists I admire very much. I actually went to the school that they studied at and taught at. So they've been in my life since going to that art school over 50 years ago!

These interviews were conducted in and around the time of the reception for the 2007 LGAA Open Juried Show April 15, 2007. I regret not being able to conduct other interviews with award winning artists from the LGAA for this show. I hope to be more comprehensive in the future.

--Kevin Kasik, Newsletter Editor

You can write Kevin at Kevin@kevinkasikart.com