

JUROR STATEMENT - WAA Avant-Garde Abstract
August 16 to September 8, 2019

*What is avant garde? In French, **avant-garde means** the “vanguard” or the “advance guard” — basically the people and ideas that **are** ahead of their time. Usually it refers to a movement in the arts, like Dadaism, or in politics, like anarchism. **Avant-garde can** also be used as an adjective to describe something that's cutting-edge.’*

I am honored to be juror for Wickford Art Association’s Abstract Avant-garde exhibition. In 2019, we can play more freely and loosely with artistic terminologies and with the notion of ‘what stands for what’. As for abstract, this may be an idea that is visually represented using conventional art supplies or perhaps a compiling or arrangement of unconventional materials. The abstraction may be a psychological interpretation or an organization or distortion of physical things or shapes, color, line and space in two and three dimensionalities.

As an artist myself and as a curator working with contemporary art and highly skilled talents, avant-garde is something that I seek out. It is readily viewable online and through social media – Instagram in particular is a great source. It is wonderful when artwork takes my breath away. It reveals itself in many provocative ways.

The works I chose for this exhibition and in particular, for prize, best encapsulated this notion of further inquiry, second looks and a studying of materials and subject matter.

Draping by Bonnie Jaffe, had me right from the first walk past. I did not know if I was looking at a collage, photograph, fiber or combination of mixed media. Visions of human figure moving through space were evoked and there is a sensuality in the overlapping of form and texture. The colors are subtle yet strong and they hold healthy contrast. Bonnie has demonstrated a great balance of these elements in her piece. The composition is sumptuous and it had me imagining the work outside of the frame, floating as fiber freely hanging from a ceiling as large as a wall.

Juke Box by Cynthia DiDonato, was a stand out for me. I was pulled in again and again for further examination. Her non-paper paper choice is similar to Yupo where the medium can sit up on top of the surface and be manipulated over and over for digging in, pushing, extracting and re-layering. It is reminiscent of monotype, which is one of my favorite printing processes. The color choices and dark and light areas are architectural in nature. The artist has built a city within a ground and a sky that are pleasantly directionless.

Cosmic Strawberry by Laura White Carpenter, is like a gift from the spirit world. A little drop of water or tear plunked down in our material world. The delicate point at the top, I imagine, is where the form detached from its birth place. To construct such a figure and complete its process over a live flame is a brave and magical process. The iridescence of the glazing and the little dimples on Cosmic Strawberry are delightful and gave me goose bumps. It was difficult to choose between her two sculptures, but ultimately, I fell in love with the complexities of the color pallet.

It Works by Joyce Kachapis, is a piling and a slow, yet energetic build-up of materials in a masterfully organized chaotic manner. My eye travels everywhere and nowhere, in striking ways. I jumped around, but was continuously brought back to various centers. I saw rams, vehicles, love and war. This collage gifted me a very unique journey and I am not quite sure where I went. Ample stimulus is provided and should entice onlookers to construct their own stories, independent of the artist's.

Restless by Beth Johnston, is a wow. I tend to seek out figurative artwork. Though it is very vastly different from abstraction as we are conventionally 'trained' to believe in, it is incredibly emotionally abstract. There are four figures, but they are all the same. They render a strange conversation that I am absolutely intrigued by. The forms create a sort of 'U' shape in a space that is empty but not. There are objects - doors, a stool, cabinets like doorways and a reflective, slightly unsettling green floor. The title of this piece is perfectly landed.

Chaos in Darkness and Light by Janet Austin, had me right away. I had no idea what it was that I was seeing but it pulled me into its ambiguity and I wanted to touch it. The dark panel at the top evoked thoughts of traditional sonogram and below, in the light panel, I felt as if something was letting go. I so appreciated the mystery here and the use of materials. I wished to see the two square tiles given more space externally and set further from the wall to elevate their powerful statement. I am not a fiber artist and hold the utmost admiration for those who can so skillfully manipulate fibrous medium.

Stripes and Reflection by Marc Jaffe, took me several passes and a long pause to really see what it was I was viewing. I first saw a splitting of stripes into an empty dark opening of space, like an unzipping. I saw positive and negative. It was very striking from across the room. Then I saw the slight hint of chairs in the top half of the darkness. Reflections on the glass within the gallery had that hiding until I was slowing down to zoom into the pieces that were stopping me for the closest revisits. It was jarring to find that this idea I had originally formed, was not actually the reality and I appreciated the surprise.

I would urge any artist who is playing with the concept of avant-garde to seek out a letting go of self, in ways that are personally unexpected and rather uncomfortable. It is in this space, that truly new visions are birthed. Seek out art that elicits an uneasy feeling and let that infiltrate your own work.

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