



Fur, Feathers, Fins

February 2021

Betsey MacDonald – Jurist

Henri Matisse said, “Creativity takes courage.” Courage is particularly important when entering a juried show. So, I commend and congratulate all of you for having the courage, first to create your art and then go one step further and enter it in WAA’s *Fur, Feathers and Fins*. When I was asked to be the juror for my favorite WAA juried show, I was excited to think my job would entail looking carefully at a wide variety of animal art. The only thing I’d rather spend time observing would be the animals themselves. Then I realized I would have to choose the pieces that I personally find engaging or thought provoking or even just fun and that several pieces would have to be excluded. I know how rejection feels! I recently was denied admission to a local show and as a result, I tore the drawing up! I do think I overreacted a bit but it’s important to remember that everyone reacts differently to a piece of art. Art should make the viewer feel something. So, please know that I have chosen the pieces that elicit a feeling from me but very possibly, another viewer may have made a totally different selection based on their own experience.

When evaluating art, I look for a fresh point of view. I love to be surprised by art. I also am drawn to a piece that I feel was created extremely carefully as an expression of love. The pieces that I have chosen made me laugh, awed me, made me wonder about how they were done, drew me in and made me want to learn more. Jurying this show made me love animals even more because of their mind-boggling variety, their complexity and their undeniable connection to our lives.

The Judges Awards go to two pieces that speak to me very personally. “No Social Distancing” by Beth Johnston is a little encaustic gem. Many years ago, as an art student, a classmate was obsessed by encaustic. I envied the rich smooth surfaces of her paintings. I’ve always wanted to try it, to take a class but the most I did was buy a book and get deterred by the need of a vent and ultimately ended up with cold wax. Beth’s encaustic piece is divided into thirds, with almost complementary colors of orangey rust and a cool gray blue setting up an atmosphere of space. It has that rich semi-gloss finish that I love. The focal point is a line of birds on a wire which we’ve all seen and wondered, “What are they up to?” One little guy has taken off. One is just hopping off so we wonder where they’re off to and will they all leave? It’s a great little painting!

The next Judge’s award is a painting also but on top of a collage of papers and words. “Messenger” by Susan Sward draws me in and makes me want to figure it out. The beautifully rendered wren makes you feel his nervous energy with his stance. But why the word “Preface” and what’s this about a sentence? I want to know! Collage intrigues me but I can never figure out what to use! Susan has made careful choices with her papers and their placement. Both the composition and subject work together in harmony.

The two honorable mention pieces relate to our world in the large sense and right here at home I can’t help but see “My World” by Paul Murray as a statement on global warming. In this carefully composed photo, we see this huge, powerful mammal observing his world, a world that we know is

shrinking. How can a beast so powerful be driven to extinction as his sea ice melts away? It's a beautifully sad and poignant photograph. On a lighter note, we see his greenish yellow tint. But polar bears are white! I love to be surprised so I looked up polar bears and it turns out that their fur has no color and is hollow so organisms may grow within it or it may be stained. Art often inspires us to learn!

How can we have a show about animals and not have man's best friend? Jody Manca's small acrylic painting entitled "Waiting" portrays the essence of the dog. They just want to be with us and when we're away, they wait for us to return. Haven't we all seen dogs in trucks doing exactly what Jody's dog is doing? Her dog is painted with loose confident brush strokes in a limited palette of gold and blue. Her strokes show us the round form of the dog and the flat metal and glass of the truck. It's a neat little acrylic that says a great deal about man's best buddy.

Third place is a gorgeous black and white photograph by Marc Jaffe, entitled "Looking Out." Its compositional strength is based on repetition of geometric shapes. Each horse is framed by a black rectangle. The barn is rectangular except for the roof triangle which repeats several times in the barn doors. Within this hard-edged geometry are two wonderful paint horses, each in their own stall, standing quietly but with ears focused on Marc. It's a simple farm scene but with a lasting impression.

Second place is "Beach Music" by Ann Hagan Webb. I can almost hear this triumvirate of gulls vocalizing! It feels like a day at the ocean and I know we're all ready to be there. The gulls are carefully painted with light and dark successfully creating their soft round forms. Their beaks form a triangle that makes me want to look up. These birds make me wonder why so many people don't like seagulls. They are very clever birds who take wonderful care of their young and who are said to be great communicators. Good art should make you feel something, and this painting puts me right there with these very cool birds.

First place is "Monkey Trio" by Lisa May. This sculpture is so much fun and meticulously made. It's CAST paper! Lisa makes and shapes this paper and ends up with dancing monkeys in colorful little vests which are also paper, holding up a piece of glass! I think of organ grinders and their coin chasing monkeys. Not only does an opposable thumb allow them to hold up a cup but they can hold tables, too. They have canine teeth and funny little feet; this sculpture is just wonderful! One is upside down and they are wise monkeys who see no evil, hear no evil and speak no evil. This is a beautifully crafted and joyful piece of art!

Thank you to WAA for inviting me to judge this show. It's been an honor to look at all this beautiful furry, feathery and even finny art and to spend time thinking about all these inspiring animals and artists.

Betsey MacDonald - Jurist for *Fur, Feathers, Fins*

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I am an artist who loves animals. I have a BFA and an MFA in Studio Art. I also completed a pre-med program, so I bring a love of science and a knowledge of anatomy to my art. I taught high school Chemistry and Biology for 25 years and Art for 10 years and am a juried member of the American Academy of Equine Art.