

## **Jurors' Statement**

The prospect of judging an exhibition of numerous and varied works can seem both daunting and exhilarating in its possibilities—from all the visual options presented, how can one possibly choose? The inevitable starting point is the technical proficiency and refinement of craftsmanship demonstrated by the artists. But for the assemblage of a unified body of work, more discerning criteria are needed. Art is ultimately subjective, as it should be. One's reaction to powerful art forms a personal connection to the mind, personality and expressiveness of the artist. And a powerful artist transcends the basic “elements of art” (colour, line, shape, form and texture) to make that connection possible, to engage with emotional, cerebral or visceral intent.

Suddenly, a vast gallery of art becomes a gathering of individuals whom we meet on their terms, as well as our own. Sometimes that meeting results in an overwhelming “click,” creating the experience of love at first sight, that shocking sensation of familiar recognition for a subject not previously encountered. And other times that personal connection with the persona of the art comes from a quest for deeper understanding of what is not at first apparent, an expression of “otherness,” or a profound appreciation for the skill and talent exhibited by the artist.

As jurors, we savoured these interactions, speaking to the art and to each other in our quest to build an exhibition. Our responses sometimes conflicting and sometimes identical, we traversed the joyful, pensive, whimsical, disruptive and occasionally uncomfortable, each reacting to the array of individuality represented here, as we intensely examined every work submitted.

The result, we believe, creates a collective conversation of personality and skill, replete with powerful testaments to the strength and vibrancy of the arts and artists in the Michiana region. Ultimately, as we look intently into the psyche of others, we find greater insight into ourselves.

Karen Bondarchuk  
Condessa Croninger

### **Best of Show – *Fairytales Are Subject To Decay* by Heidi Bailey**

This outrageous sculpture teases out several tropes playfully, hilariously and intelligently. As the title of this work seems to suggest, we are often confronted with idealized notions of courtship, love and beauty that run counter to experience. The repurposed objects and unusual materials combined in this work are a big part of its charm and impact (note that the bottom ‘pin cushion’ is actually a small rubber tire). It is an ode to the ersatz – mass-produced pink colonial figurines stand atop a sparkling bead-encrusted swan floating on a sea of pink pins – as well as a nod to the enduring stereotypes of privilege and symbols of affluence.

### **Merit Awards:**

#### **Painting – *Sunday Afternoon at the Art Institute* by Roni Balthes**

One could marvel at *Sunday Afternoon at the Art Institute* purely for its aesthetic prowess, though it would seriously sell this work short. The frame-within-the-frame composition pulls us into the meta-experience of viewing the viewing of a viewing, and poses thought-provoking questions. With whom do we identify and why? How does Seurat's *Afternoon* differ from Roni Balthes's *Afternoon* (and our afternoon as viewers)? How do we interpret the identity of the young woman on the right (who has been positioned enmeshed with the work of Seurat's original), whose face and identity we cannot see, and what is her perception of the

wealthy Parisians on the banks of the Seine? What of the Caucasian gentleman on the left, keeping a safe distance? The self-conscious act of looking is both text and subtext in this memorable and mesmerizing piece.

### **Photography – *Teach Your Children* by Todd Hoover**

*Teach Your Children* is a visual feast of colors, shapes and simplified coloring-book-type imagery that raises questions about creativity and the role of 'scripted' art – namely, the postwar Paint By Number kits of the 1950s and the ubiquity of coloring book aesthetics. The quiriness of the disembodied Paint By Number palette (which historically was dictated more by the confines of the feasibility of its manufacturing than by any application of color theory), is the perfect backdrop to the three simplified birds in this digital photograph, and begs the question of what we teach our children when we ask them to 'stay between the lines.'

### **Sculpture – *Black Widow* by Louise Pappageorge**

The notion of a sculpture that defies its very materiality – lace as a structural element – is an intriguing one. Its composition argues the ornamental and romanticized sensibility of "traditional female art forms," juxtaposed with the suggestion of a forged armature. The title further complexifies this work by conjuring both the dreaded black widow spider and the lace worn by grieving widows. If Louise Bourgeois' *Spider* were to ever magically create a web, it would quite possibly bear resemblance to this curious work...

### **Ceramic – *Calliope* by Dora Natella**

Dora Natella's command of the human figure is authoritative, and *Calliope* is a particularly fine example within the oeuvre of figurative sculpture. Acute sensitivity to form and detail hearkens back to classical Greek statuary (as the title would suggest), but the work is contemporized by the palpable self-assuredness and introspection of the female figure, which defy traditional idealization of the female form.

### **Mixed Media – *What Holds You Together?* By Mary Amador**

This striking mixed-media painting powerfully entwines the timeless *sturm und drang* of adolescence with the delicate threads that form one's cultural identity. The contrast of the defined, enamel-like quality of the painted surface and its dark graffiti-laden backdrop – a kind of isolating void surrounding the figure – with the brilliantly painted prayer icons and actual traditional woven fringe on the shirt suggests a battle of selfhood. Much like the unwavering gaze of the teenager, the title of this work forces us to square with the struggle of identity we all face in existence.

### **Printmaking – *Thus It Began* by Stephanie Carnell**

Though it is unclear whether this etching was created in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, it certainly manifests the other-worldliness that so many of us have been experiencing this year. The technical mastery of the etching – a jet black and nuanced grey atmosphere contrasted with stark biomorphic shapes – draws the viewer into this phantasmagorical landscape, a setting that remains ambiguous and mysterious, and yet hauntingly all too familiar.

## **JURORS**

### **Karen Bondarchuk**

Professor & Area Coordinator of Foundation Art  
Western Michigan University Kalamazoo

### **Condessa Croninger**

Art Director  
20 North Gallery  
Toledo, Ohio