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Juried show takes discerning eye

ART AT THE X



Deborah Emont Scott, director/CEO of the Taft Museum of Art, juried entries for the show Art at the X at the Xavier University Art Gallery. / The Enquirer/Gary Landers

Written by Jackie Demaline

What: Art at the X National Juried Competition

When: 10 a.m.-4 p.m. weekdays. 12-4 p.m. special opening Sept. 24, Smithsonian Museum Day

Where: Xavier University Art Gallery, 1658 Herald Ave., A.B. Cohen Center.

Admission: Free. 513-745-3811.

Deborah Emont Scott carefully studied the newly installed Art at the X late one afternoon last week. The exhibit consists of two galleries filled with works from a national juried competition.

Scott, director/CEO of the Taft Museum of Art, is juror for the exhibit, which opened Friday, and she was carrying out her final duty - choosing a winner and whatever works she found deserving of awards of merit.

For an hour Scott explained how she juries - a job that began several months ago, when she started

looking through 136 slides from 46 artists from 21 states and Canada. She winnowed them to 50.

"What I always like to do is look through everything first," and we did our first circle through a wide-ranging show that includes oils, etchings, photography, charcoals, collage, prints, pastels, pen and ink, woodcuts, lithographs and new media, installed by gallery director M. Katherine Uetz.

With a few exceptions, Scott was satisfied with her choices. "It's difficult when you're not seeing the actual works." It's impossible to measure texture and depth of color.

Her goal was to judge "the greatest level of accomplishment" and at the same time include a variety of styles.

Scott immediately pointed out a small colored-pencil drawing of seeds sprouting. "This was the first image on the disc," she said with a bright smile. "I was so happy - I thought, 'the level is really good.' "

We strolled, we paused. "I like paint," Scott said. "I'm interested in what artists like to do with paint."

A landscape is more about a man on a balcony than the twilight world around him, and Scott was intrigued to see the painting was populated by people hiding enigmatically in the shadows, so shadowed they couldn't be seen on the slide.

There's a touch of surrealism, "my least favorite style," but for Scott it's not about her taste but what's done well.

Sometimes a viewer is moved by the act of art-making, the technique, the material, the process, and sometimes by the message, Scott said. "Ideally you're moved by the two things together - the message successfully conveyed through the medium."

Scott looked at Cincinnati artist Sherry Goodson's "Brett's Redtail Hawk." "There's room for good, realistic renderings of nature."

She was beguiled by a series of two-color lithographs with rabbits standing in for humans. In "Night Collecting" several are on an old dock, a rowboat in the water nearby. "What are they collecting?" Scott wondered. "This would be a great artist for children's books."

She admired woodcuts by Kathleen Ristinen of Athens, Ohio, and Uetz noted that her work is chosen for mention "year after year."

There was "deceptively simple" work Scott was intrigued to see in person, to see if it was "more than meets the eye." She also likes "quirky," like the texture, color, organic shapes and stitching of a colored-pencil drawing on a book page sewn on Braille paper.

The winner of Art at the X receives a solo show at Xavier's gallery, and Scott said, "That's an added responsibility to the juror. Part of the consideration has to be, does the artist have the breadth and enough to say that's engaging and compelling?"

The winning entry: an engraving by Evan Lindquist of Jonesboro, Ark., one of three Scott accepted for the show. She admired his technique, and said the themes are clear. "His subjects are scientists, poets, philosophers, artists - there's a lot here. And it's new work - that's important."