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Q&As: Meet the August Award Winners

📁 Artist Interviews 🕒 August 21, 2013

📌 ahmed alkarkhi, jo ellen murphy, kathleen best gillman, pamela patrick, sabyna sterrett, scapes, shapes

Our popular landscape and sculpture shows, "Scapes" and "Shapes," garner entries from many of our talented artists, making competition for a spot on the wall, and a cash prize, that much more tough. Jurors from these two exhibits chose five awards: one recognizing the best sculpture in "Shapes," and four for "Scapes." We asked the artists to tell us a little about their work, below.

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- [Kathleen Best Gillman, *Inundated \(Intertidal 8\)*](#)



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Award (“Shapes”): [Sabyna Sterrett](#), *Pristine Environment*, string and plastic bags

As someone who started out as a fiber artist, how do you think it fits into a sculpture exhibit with more “traditional” materials like bronze and stone? I think hard and soft materials go well

together in any sculpture exhibit. This work was a challenge as I always go through a process of trial and error when trying to make work that is cohesive in a group exhibit yet strong enough to stand alone. I tried many configurations before I simplified the design to just one string, a hole in the small plastic bag and with a twist or twirl of my hand layered one bag on top of the other. I wanted the look and feel of earth in the balance before humans marred the environment with our consumption and defacing.

How does this differ from your woven and hooked pieces? This is the first work in which I used the whole bag, uncut or manipulated by me, so that the viewer can actually see it as an intact plastic bag. It differs in that it is just a simple design, but, I hope a powerful one. Also, even tho the idea of this work took varied directions trying many different sizes of bags and ways to put them together, it is not as hard as weaving or hooking with repetitive motion techniques that are very hard on one’s hand. I usually work on two or three works at the same time for this reason. Also, it looks totally different from the other work, cut and pulled through or hooked on a canvas.

The juror said that “Shapes” was all about materials. How does plastic, and your particular choice of plastic for each piece, impact your work? I like the idea of the bags, which are used for trash and debris, being elevated to show the beauty of the object — the creases, the folds, even scratches and holes, the evidence of the human hands that used it, even though it is a man-made item destined to be thrown away. I have been using plastic bags in my work for the past nine years and still feel challenged to explore this material even further. The public has become involved by giving me bags, which I like. I am now trying a sewn project with a new sewing machine I just purchased. I have a huge inventory of them and expect I will explore them until I feel I have done everything I can do with them. I find sometimes the material wants to bend or lean a certain way and as an artist, one should “listen” to the material and not force it to go in another direction. I try to work in compatibility with the material.

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Krekeler Brower

Best in Show Award (“Scapes”): [Ahmed al Karkhi](#), *Landscape of Maryland*, oil

What’s the story behind this painting? This road is beautiful and reminds me of my country [Iraq], where I often draw nature. Here was a different scene with various trees, but no palm trees. But I love the nature of Maryland where the four seasons give a different impression of nature.

I made many shows about nature in the past (see a gallery [here](#)). In the future I’m prepared to set up a personal exhibition in the month of November about the beauty of nature in Maryland.

(Read more about Ahmed’s paintings of Iraq and his art career in [this NPR story](#).)

Potomac Valley Watercolor Award:

Pamela Patrick, *Foggy Outlook*

What’s the story behind this painting? This is the bird sanctuary off Sunset Dr. in Cape May, NJ. I have spent summer in Cape May “down the shore” as they say, since I was a small child. I have watched as the area we see turned from a dairy farm to a marsh due to the encroachment of the ocean through the years. Despite the lawsuit against the Army Corps of Engineers, which won the cape intensive dredging and restructuring the beaches to 1955 conditions, the Atlantic is relentlessly taking the land. I suspect the birds will lose this as well.

It was a foggy spring morning and I went out to see what painting I could find. The structure is a lookout for birders in the midst of the marshy sanctuary. It was framed by the reeds, cat tails, and scrub brush. Beyond was the beat of the waves and the cry of the birds. I took several shots and this is a composite.

What makes a good landscape painting? Since I haven’t been painting for very long, I really don’t feel qualified to dictate, but I have been purchasing art and know what draws my attention. I look for mood, imaginative use of color, and viewpoint. We all look at the sights

around us, but creative ways to interpret the mundane always is stunning to us ... seeing with new eyes.

Why do you work in watercolor as opposed to some other medium? Watercolors always attracted me. My collection is dominated by them. Years ago I had the privilege of knowing Don “Bemco” Bennett, who was resident artist for the Sun Valley resort in Ketchum, Idaho. He introduced me to Nancy Taylor Stonington, another favorite. The images are delicate, or strong, precise or a wash and altogether a ballet where you never lose sight of the principals or the chorus.

Dee Gee Watling

Memorial Award for Pastel: [JoEllen Murphy](#), *Morning Light at Eastern Neck*

What’s the story behind this landscape? Every winter I apply for at least a few plein air events that take place in our area in the spring and summer. The painting *Morning Light at Eastern Neck* was painted in April on the first day of the Paint the Town Chestertown event in Chestertown, MD. I had driven to Eastern Neck Wildlife Refuge with another painter in March to scope out the area. I found this small pond with some trees at the refuge that really appealed to me. I believe this was my best painting during the event because I was so excited to finally get outside and paint “en plein air.” I find that I am not much of a plein air painter unless it’s above 60 degrees!

What makes a good landscape painting? For me, a good landscape painting must have a great composition, good color, a focal point and a sense of depth.

What’s your philosophy on color? Color is so important in the landscape. I love to watch prospective buyers look at a wall of paintings to see what catches their eye. I often notice that they gravitate towards a red tree in the green landscape or a field of lavender with a yellow sky. Without even realizing it, there is an affinity to be drawn to complementary colors. So much of the landscape in the mid-Atlantic area is green. It takes years of experience to learn how to use warm colors to enhance the greens. Lately, I have been painting all of my pastel boards a bright orange. Once you start layering pastels on the orange underpainting, the greens just sing! I think that is what made my painting *Morning Light at Eastern Neck* successful.

I have a show coming up this fall at the Arts Barn in Gaithersburg, MD as well as NIH. Here's a link to my [website](#) for details.

Chameli & Amiya

Bose Award for Acrylic or Oil Painting: [Kathleen Best Gillman](#), *Inundated (Intertidal 8)*, acrylic

What's the story behind this painting? I painted *Inundated* and *Intertidal*, the series it's a member of, because of my fascination with the ocean and the effect of the tides on our North American shoreline and the bodies of water that pour into the sea. Each day, the tides rise and fall twice along the boundary where the land meets the sea and penetrate the land, frequently reversing the flow of rivers and streams that empty into the ocean. *Inundated* captures the hour when the tide is at its peak, fully submerging the Mousam River salt marsh behind Parsons Beach in southern Maine. This view is accessible from Route 9 in Kennebunk, the town where I grew up. I painted the Intertidal series to create a cohesive body of work for my most recent solo show (July 2013) at the Workhouse Arts Center, Lorton, VA. This particular series continues the theme of coastal landscapes I've been working on for a number of years.

What captured my attention and inspired me to paint this particular view were the clouds overhead and the sparseness of the scene. While recently I have been striving for a more painterly effect often by letting some of the under painting show, *Inundated* takes a different tact consistent with an approach that capitalizes upon broad areas of modulated color. To create more interest in the sky and to balance the texture of the salt marsh grasses visible at the peak of high tide, I selectively created visual and real texture in the broken cloud formations near the horizon. These details give the viewer something exciting to look at once they approach the canvas for a closer look.

What makes a good landscape painting? Exceptional paintings usually make a good impression viewed from a distance and then prove equally fascinating upon closer inspection. Good composition is the foundation of a good painting and typically is perceived first by the viewer. Beyond composition, the artist's skill in handling paint and color support this foundation. Selective details and a variety of edges also play a part. Balancing these elements and others like line, value, shape, texture, etc., result in a good painting. Next, there is the need to create convincing light and usually a single light source in a landscape painting

by handling lights and darks effectively. Finally, every good painting creates a visceral response in the viewer. This response may stir an emotion, connect with a memory or sense of place, or touch that place in the human heart where we respond with wonder or intellectual curiosity. Exceptional works of art draw the viewer in and invite the viewer to return again and again exciting interest with each return visit; like a good friend, we don't tire of their company.

How or when do you decide whether a landscape (or any other subject) is better suited to acrylic or pastel? For *Inundated*, I selected acrylic paint because I've learned how to paint larger areas of the canvas smoothly and rapidly — this is comparable to creating large glazed areas in watercolor. With experience and intuition, I often know immediately which media (acrylic or pastel) I will use for each new work of art. In the past there were some motifs that I purposely worked in two or more media for the practice of building skill in each medium. These days when I start a new work, I often have in mind what I am striving for, that is, I have an idea what I want the finished product to look like. Sometimes I develop the initial concept through preliminary sketches, sometimes the concept comes when I am making reference photos in the field, sometimes it comes when I am organizing those photos on the computer.

Because pastel is a dry media it requires a surface with tooth to adhere properly. Consequently many different textural effects are possible for pastel depending on the surface selected. Also, pastels are a more direct media the way I use them. Acrylic paints are first mixed on a palette to create the color desired. Thousands of colors, shades, tints, may be mixed, then applied. Pastels may also be mixed, scumbled, overlaid, etc., but also exist in a dizzying array (thousands) of manufactured colors which can be applied directly. Consequent to the way I use the two different media, I usually select paint when I am less interested in the effect of texture and pastel when I want to incorporate substrate (surface) texture in the finished work.

My next solo show will be at the Loft Gallery, Occoquan, VA in November. Watch my [blog](#) or [website](#) for details.

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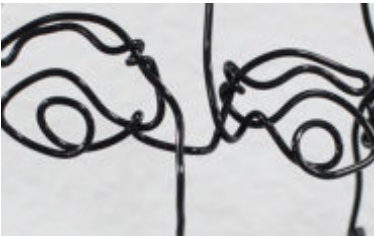
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trudi vandyke
Sabyna's work is amazing and her interview was exceptionally revealing. It is a pleasure to read how much goes into the finished sculptures. congrats to all the award winners.
August 21, 2013



nancy macgregor
Sabyna is an exceptional person and artist following her gifted insight into ordinary everyday items and seeing beyond to share with us. Congrats to all the fabulous award winners!



Eileen Grieve Stokes

Having just returned from a weekend in Kennebunk, Maine, and seeing the sky and its color and the exact spot painted by Kathleen Best Gillman, it is a joy to look at her painting and to be transported back to the sunshine and feel of the area. Kathleen has a great rapport with the area and the sea.

August 23, 2013

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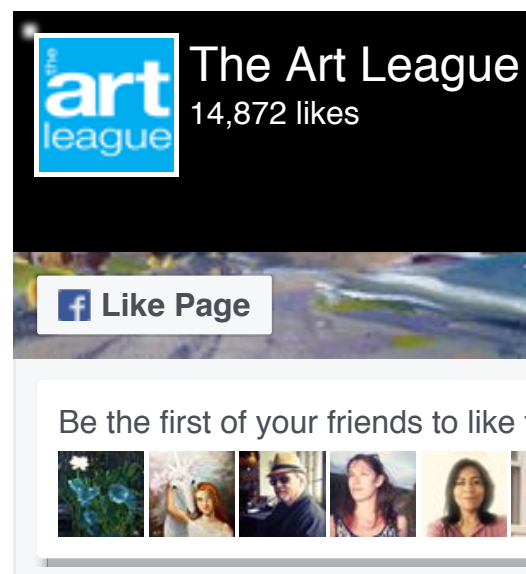


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