

Anne Havel

JUROR STATEMENT

Surface Matters: Grit or Gloss, a juried exhibition of the Enamelist Society, is intended to bring a vast array of surfaces to the viewer with a mind to broaching matters of deep concern or relevance to the artist. At the time of conception, no one could have predicted that we would all be navigating a world of financial and social uncertainty, leading to a level of unprecedented upheaval in many peoples' lives.

Demonstration of skill from both a technical and aesthetic perspective, was not questioned for each accepted piece therefore I will limit my commentary to the innovative use of the medium, subject matter, or technique offered as opposed to the craftsmanship and skill of the work.

Enamel has the great fortune of being able to fuse to both metal and other glass. And with this great fortune, the artist has the opportunity to exploit this unique combination, where the metal and glass are able to be on equal footing. The object can become vastly more precious as the enamel is almost elevated to jewel status as it replaces precious gems within the piece, emphasizing both the metal and enamel skills of the artist.

Decals were employed by quite a number of applicants and in ways that were not the focus of the final piece; the decal was simply a platform to express the ideas and concerns of the artist, often political or social, integrating seamlessly into the completed work. The selected Best in Show piece "Extinction Vessel #6: Veneer" by Harlan Butt, as well as his other accepted work, "Extinction Vessel #1: Gone Forever" integrated decals as a part of what would appear to be a much larger moral imperative being conveyed. Other noteworthy use of decals within the accepted work include: Kimberly Nogueira's "High Wire" bracelet which seems to be part of a story to read on the bracelet; Michelle Startzman's unusual use of decals that become almost lost within the natural beauty of the scene in each piece; Pat Nelson's "Hurricane 3 - Oilfields" and "Hurricane 4 - Caribbean Damage" would appear to offer the viewer a glimpse into the impending dangers of global climate change; and Cynthia Eid's mesmerizing dot and trail patterns in "Crossroads" and "Trails and Fields".

Another technique utilized in many submissions was limoges and the award for Best Wall Work, awarded to Martha Banyas for her piece "Divisions and Deliberations" would seem to be a platform to express personal journeys through extensive use of the technique and the narrative form. Other notable uses of limoges include Pat Frese's "Nest #3", a multi-layered piece with immense depth and Jessica Calderwood's pieces "Closed" and "Open", potentially inviting us to consider the many social issues that could cause an option to be closed or open to specific persons.

Unanimously the jurors agreed that the student work was extremely strong and the jury awarded Best in Jewelry to Zhongfang Zhang, whose work is both sculptural and exemplary in emphasizing both metal and glass. Both "Kaleidoscope", selected as the award winner, and

the other accepted work "Small Gallery" are excellent examples of balancing the technical with the artistic. Mehrdad Bagherpourhamedani's submissions were exciting examples of the *champlevé* technique. Again, both sculptural and wearable, his necklace "My Fantasy Tiles" emphasized both balance and design. Other students that deserve mention are Alisha Potter, Emily Pellini, and Johannes Postlmayr.

Although we saw virtually no examples of *plique à jour*, the two submissions by Ching Chih Wu emphasized the brilliance and transparency of glass in the pierced vessels he created. The jury awarded Best in Sculpture to his piece "The Night Coral", but either submission could have been chosen for its luminosity. Of note was also the work of Beate Gegenwart for her tight use of the *sgraffito* technique.

As the title of this exhibition implies, glass has the ability to be transparent, translucent, opalescent, or opaque and these various qualities can be exploited by the artist to bring us varying surfaces to explore. Through the use of various techniques such as laser or acid etching, sandblasting, abrasion, grinding, sugar-firing, and other forms of surface alteration, the artist has the capacity to use the medium to communicate ideas that few other media possess. Excellent utilization of textile and sugar-firing techniques to achieve its visual intrigue were the two submissions from Melis Agabigum.

I am continuously impressed by the innovation that becomes available to our medium. Techniques and technology that were not available, or so rarely used, that even a decade or two ago it would have been almost inconceivable to imagine how it would be done, were here and are included in this exhibition. The variety of the accepted work should offer the viewer a marvelous selection of pattern, color, line, form, texture, and subject matter as well as the opportunity to contemplate the moment and our own place within it.

Barbara McFadyen

JUROR STATEMENT

As a board member with The Enamelist Society it has been a privilege to not only be part of the planning of this exhibition but enriching to also serve as a juror and share the responsibility of reviewing the works in response to this exhibition call. The primary focus of Surface Matters: Grit or Gloss was to showcase the diverse approaches of contemporary enamel artists and their investigations of surface treatment while imparting a sense of present-day enameling. Surface has always been a critical part of enameling, sharing a long history and association with jewelry in which enamel surfaces were chiefly high gloss. Today, there is a distinct trend away from the traditional reflective surface fully fired enamel to matt or underfired surfaces. "Grit or Gloss" grew from a riff on the alliteration of SNAG's theme "Grit to Gold". The preface "Surface Matters" evolved to encompass and impart a number of subtler meanings. While Grit or Gloss refers to information related to finish, Surface Matters can also be interpreted as a declarative phrase— surface *does* matter. Yet looking beneath the surface elements, many of the stronger pieces in this exhibition express deeper meanings and underlying personal stories or imperative social commentary. Altogether, the response to this exhibition call presents a singular view of current day approach to the medium of enamel.

It was exciting to view the exceptional array of 153 entries varying from traditional to experimental, technically challenging to intellectually stimulating. The categories of sculpture and wall work far outweighed those of jewelry. After careful review, 64 works in Cloissoné, Champlevé, Limoges, or innovative combinations of were accepted. There are more admirable pieces in this exhibition that deserve comment and recognition than space will allow, but it is heartening proof that the field of enameling not only remains strong but continues to flourish despite the current time of difficulty, uncertainty in this state of pandemic. It takes inspiration, grit, and dedication to create beautiful, emotive, and sophisticated works as seen in this exhibition of enamel art and I commend and thank all those artists who persevered and submitted work.

As jurors, we were all were in accord that the breadth of student entries was unusually strong, in both creativity and technique. This was exciting and encouraging for the future of the enameling field as a whole. Many of the enamel works from these emerging voices deserve recognition, but of particular note, was *Kaleidoscope*, by Zhongfang Zhang whose unique work was awarded *Best in Jewelry*. This highly sculptural work in the form of eyeglasses was both innovative in form and incorporation of enamel. Departing from the normal purpose to see more clearly, this unique pair of glasses with swirling stenciled opaque enamel lenses, gives one the sense of looking into another world and reality. It is unusual for a student work to win this honor, but for this piece it is well deserved. I would be remiss however, if I did not also mention the work of Alisha Potter and her impressive use of Champlevé in her wall piece *Venice Diptych*. Her technique is faultless, and her striking use of color, shading, and composition coalesces into an intriguing view of the canals of Venice.

Night Coral by Ching Chih Wu received the Award for Best in Sculpture/Vessel category with his exceptional plique à jour forged vessel which is not only unusual in form, but mesmerizing in the use of color and technique. The artist's skill in his plique à jour technique is awe-inspiring. Immediately one feels as if this piece just arose shimmering from beneath the sea.

Another entry in the sculpture category that drew my interest and deserves mention is Mary Chuduk's *Winged Teapot*, made of raised copper, sifted and painted enamel and completed with a unique electroformed copper spout and handle. This mythical vessel has a beautifully painted lustrous wing which almost gives the sense it is ready take flight.

Awarded Best in Wall Work is the outstanding narrative piece *Divisions and Deliberations* by Martha Banyas. Executed predominantly in soft matt surfaces this piece demonstrates masterful skill in Limoges painting.

The viewer is captivated at first sight by the beauty and sense of mystery in exquisite intertwining and overlapping forms. Delicately painted leaves and branches, a snake-like form, and clouds curl, bend and wind to capture and carry one's eye full circle while some forms break out of the boundary of the rectangular composition to add additional tension and interest. There lies much more *below the surface* of this intricately drawn and painted work. It tells the story of a community coming together to preserve the integrity of neighborhood and park, in order to fight the Goliath of progress and stop a bridge that would be its destruction. The form of a blue snake twisting through the right foreground references the bridge. The enigmatic figure's dress of overlapping silver Ginbari leaves, each pressed from different leaves collected from her own property, represents the neighborhood. A Kingfisher bird sits in the upper left corner acting as a denizen of the park on the river. This story of community, people caring and helping each other in difficult times is particularly heartfelt in today's turbulent world. Another compelling entry in Wall Work that deserves special recognition is Jessica Calderwood's piece titled *Open* in copper, brass, enamel, powder-coat, flocking, glass pins. Exquisitely painted, her soft surface and imagery I found to be compelling.

The *Best in Show* was awarded to Harlan Butt for his exceptional work, *Extinction Vessel # 6: Veneer*, a vessel 12" high by 4.5" wide. Primarily created in the classic technique of Cloissoné, this piece also encompasses the more painterly style of Limoges and contemporary photographic decal techniques. The surface of this piece is a traditional high gloss that is visually interrupted in three places, as if the enameled skin (or veneer) is peeling off. In these areas, there are images of deforestation, air pollution and a flotsam of plastic on a coastal sea. This work speaks strongly to the current issues of climate change and attempts to deal with elements of Nature that have gone, or are in danger of going, extinct; especially as a result of human interaction. One's eye is carried around the form from a honeybee on clover to a monarch butterfly on a milkweed plant, both of which the long-term survival is in question. This stunning piece is finished with a sterling silver rim is etched with a haiku that reads "Oh, to reconcile | Our love of Nature's beauty | With our boundless greed", resolutely imploring the viewer to awaken to the climatic crisis.

It has been an honor and my pleasure to serve as a juror for Surface Matters: Grit or Gloss. It has been a privilege to share this enriching experience of reviewing work alongside Charity Hall and Anne Havel, who are admirable enamelists in their own right. Together we strove to not only recognize the refined skills of experienced artists but to salute emerging enamelists whose fresh insights and innovative use of enamel techniques that would speak to the focus and bring new breath to this exhibition.

Charity Hall

JUROR STATEMENT

Late last fall, the Enamelist Society approached me about being a juror for this exhibition. I was delighted that we would be exhibiting enamel work during a non-conference year. As enamelists, we are the underdogs of the art world, so it is imperative that we pursue as many opportunities to bring attention to contemporary enamelists and enamel art as possible. But as the snow thawed and winter morphed into an ominously stormy spring, the coronavirus pandemic took hold, bringing unprecedented challenges. As a juror, I worried whether we would even be able to hold this exhibition given all of the upheaval and uncertainty, especially with so many artists facing a disproportionate share of economic burdens. Yet, thanks to the resilience and commitment demonstrated by each individual who courageously persevered and submitted work, our community is thriving, and the field of enamel art as a whole is buttressed by the vitality of each of these impressive artists. *Surface Matters: Grit and Gloss* encapsulates an astounding variety of enamel art and is a physical, and perhaps virtual, manifestation of dedication, possibility, and hope.

Impressive and ethereal, Ching Chih Wu's, *The Night Coral*, immediately captured my attention for its striking luminosity and undulating form. The winner of the Sculpture/Vessel Category Award, this exquisitely detailed piece radiates warmth, but also a profound sense of fragility. Beate Gegenwart's vessels with their clean, tight design elements also impressed all of the jurors.

In the Wall Category, Martha Banyas's *Divisions and Deliberations* is as mesmerizing as it is complex with its multiple layers and imagery. Pat Frese's *Nest #3* is another outstanding piece with many beautiful subtle details.

The jurors unanimously agree that the strong showing of student work deserves extra commendation. Alisha Potter's *Venice* with its saturated, bold colors is a wonderful student entry and an exemplary display of *champlevé*. Impressive works by Mehrdad Bagherpourhamedani, Emily Pellini, and Danni Xu are just a few visionary glimpses of what the next generation might bring to enamel art. We are heartened to see such a great diversity of exemplary student work, reflecting both the students' originality and the endless dedication and commitment of enamel educators and programs. And perhaps this is most clearly evident in the Jewelry Category Winner, Zhongfang Zhang's *Kaleidoscope*, which brings a fresh outlook that traverses the ever-shifting line between jewelry and sculpture.

Other notable works in the Jewelry Category include Michelle Startzman's *Hendry Morning*, an excellent and original use of photo decals to achieve an abstract surface, rather than the direct graphic imagery that is more commonly used. Similarly, the bold, colorful patterns and dizzying array of dots in Cynthia Eid's *Crossroads* is sure to turn heads and invite further examination.

Our Best in Show Award goes to Harlan Butt for *Extinction Vessel #6: Veneer*, which reminds us of the precarious ramifications of losing pollinator species and their habitat. His richly layered design and novel combination of juxtaposing decals and haiku with traditional cloisonné are further enhanced by his perfected technical execution.

Surface Matters: Grit and Gloss serves as a reminder of all that is positive in what is undoubtedly a difficult time for everyone. The extraordinary voice that each artist shared to create this collective treasure resonates within all of us and helps keep our creative spirit alive.