

SOUND JUDGEMENT

What makes one pastel rise to the top in a crowded field of excellence? Find out what goes into the decision-making process and hear advice for catching a juror's attention.

BY AMY LEIBROCK

THIS YEAR'S PASTEL 100 ENTRANTS

didn't make the job easy for Corey Pitkin, Jeanne Rosier Smith, Lisa Gleim, Michael Freeman and Cory Goulet—the five artists who served as the category jurors. The unanimous verdict was that judging this competition was inspiring, but challenging—the unavoidable consequence of an exceptional pool of entries. “It took me numerous passes and multiple pieces of paper to narrow down my selections because there were so many great paintings and not enough awards to go around,” said Gleim. Similarly, Freeman said the judging involved “several days and lots of position

changes, until eventually the final order was established.”

How, then, did the jurors determine which paintings would make the final cut? The evaluation involves a number of artistic criteria, of course, but the final choices usually come down to a more personal response and less definable qualities—an X factor that keeps a juror coming back to an entry, unable to let it go. As Pitkin put it, “The final decisions are largely subjective and come more from the gut than the mind.” Doesn't that sound a lot like painting?

Read on to dig deeper into the approach the jurors used to get to their final picks.

JURORS FOR THE 24TH ANNUAL PASTEL 100



ANIMAL & WILDLIFE

Lisa Gleim
lisagleimfineart.com



STILL LIFE & FLORAL

Michael Freeman
michaelfreemanartist.com



PORTRAIT & FIGURE

Corey Pitkin
coreypitkin.com



LANDSCAPE & INTERIOR

Jeanne Rosier Smith
jeannersiersmith.com



ABSTRACT & NON-OBJECTIVE

Cory Goulet
corygouletart.com



Pensive (pastel on paper, 12x16) by Lisa Gleim

ANIMAL & WILDLIFE

When reviewing the entries in the Animal & Wildlife category, Lisa Gleim primarily focused on how well the medium was handled, how the overall piece spoke to her and what grabbed and kept her attention. “Equally important, I looked at the draftsmanship and anatomical correctness of each animal,” says the Atlanta-based artist, a winner of four medals in the Audubon Artists awards competition. “As an academically trained artist, I believe strongly that drawing is the foundation of great art and with that foundation you can expand into more contemporary and abstract styles.”

Gleim appreciated the variety in both traditional and contemporary styles present in the category and enjoyed seeing the different ways the artists approached the medium and subject matter. “I believe pastel is the most unique of art media. Like our own handwriting, it allows for each artist’s personal distinction to show through,” she says.

Gleim’s advice to future contestants is to avoid copying their favorite artists’ styles. “Figure out what it is about their work you like and work that into your own artistry,” she says. “Each of us has our own unique signature, so let the marks in your paintings show that.”

“Each of us has our own unique signature, so let the marks in your paintings show that.”

— LISA GLEIM

STILL LIFE & FLORAL

New Zealand artist Michael Freeman described the role of juror in the Still Life & Floral category as “an honor and a privilege.” He started the process by studying each painting several times over a number of days, taking a day’s break between each viewing. “Only then was I ready to go through and identify the paintings that were worthy contenders to be considered for the final paintings.”

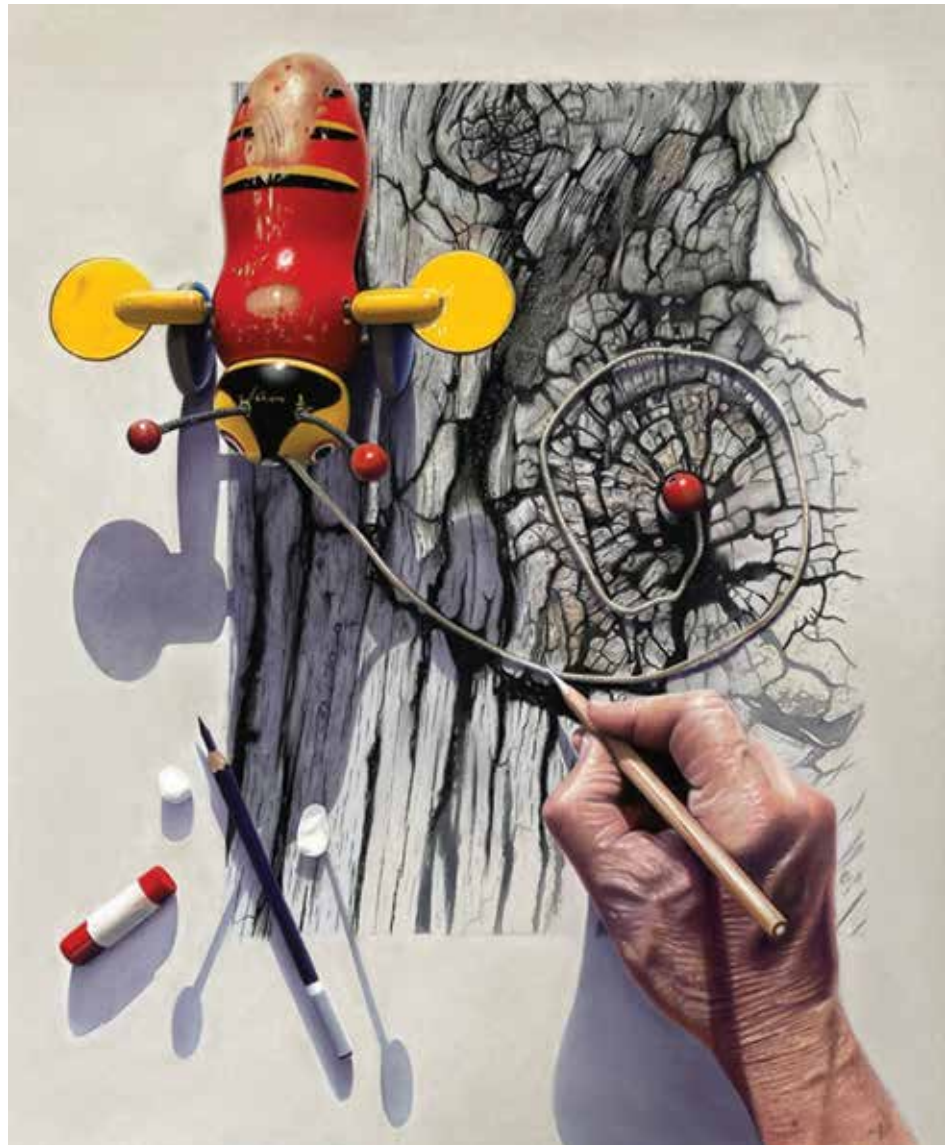
After narrowing the field to about 40 stand-out selections, Freeman focused on all aspects which contribute to a great painting: composition, concept, creativity, technique, mark-making and the handling of values, color, line, edges and more.

After another break, Freeman—himself a photorealist—selected the 25 paintings he felt best showcased the variety within the category. Finally, he considered which paintings were most compelling. “They had to show a unique vision, strong imagination and engaging story,” he says.

After jurying this year’s contest, the international award-winning pastelist offered these words of advice to future Pastel 100 entrants: “Let your inner artistic voice guide your expression.”

“Let your inner
artistic voice
guide your
expression.”

— MICHAEL FREEMAN



Sleight of Hand (pastel
on paper, 17½x14½)
by Michael Freeman



“Don’t be afraid to explore the personal side of your art—more people feel the way you do than you think.”

— COREY PITKIN

Punk (pastel on paper, 12x9) by Corey Pitkin

PORTRAIT & FIGURE

When figural artist Corey Pitkin assesses a piece of art, he asks himself three questions: Is the intention of the work clearly expressed? Is it executed competently based on the artist’s style? Does it speak to me personally? The first two questions are easy enough to answer, he says. “The last is largely subjective, but it is often, in my opinion, the most important of the three,” he says. “I’m looking for emotional impact or intellectual stimulation—something that will keep me coming back to the piece.”

Pitkin, who lives in upstate New York, is excited about the future of pastel based on the work he saw in this competition. He finds that advances in pastel materials and an influx of artists from all over the globe are pushing pastel to new frontiers. The largely self-taught pastelist advises artists to keep pushing themselves to create great work. “Don’t be afraid to explore the more personal side of your art—more people feel the way that you do than you think,” he says. “Have the courage to experiment and put all of yourself into your pastels.”



Waterlilies (pastel on paper, 32x40) by Jeanne Rosier Smith

LANDSCAPE & INTERIOR

For this competitive category, Massachusetts artist Jeanne Rosier Smith looked for strong composition, excellence of craft, and visual and emotional impact. “Subject matter that’s treated with originality, conveying a clear mood or point of view, with excellent technique and design gets noticed,” says Smith.

The artist, who’s a fellow at the St. Botolph Club of Boston, a Copley Society Master Artist and an Eminent pastelist in the International Association of Pastel Societies (IAPS), was impressed with the crop of entries in this year’s Landscape & Interior category. “Technical expertise, inventive perspectives and a stunning array of color palettes made this show difficult to judge,” she says.

Smith’s advice to “paint what you love” may sound familiar, but she argues that’s because it’s a truth, not a cliché. “When you discover a subject you love, paint 20 more—to start,” she says. “Sink your teeth in and experience the freedom and delight of getting to know a subject deeply. Take risks within that genre, allowing your craft to flourish. You’ll discover that joy and excellence often go hand in hand.”

“Sink your teeth in
and experience the
freedom and delight
of getting to know a
subject deeply.”

—JEANNE ROSIER SMITH

ABSTRACT & NON-OBJECTIVE

Cory Goulet, an IAPS Master Circle artist and a Signature Member of the Pastel Society of America, expressed her honor in having the opportunity to juror this year's entries in the Abstract & Non-Objective category. Her criteria—originality, composition, mastery of the medium, color harmony, artistic intent and overall impact—were not so different from the artists jurying representational work. Goulet sought out work that resonated—that provoked an emotional response. “It was exciting and inspiring to review each work and see each artist's interpretation,” she says.

For those hoping to catch the attention of a jury, Goulet recommends that artists take care that their images are clear, properly cropped and ready for professional review. “Don't sell yourself short by submitting something that's less than professional,” she says. She also encourages artists to consider their painting titles. “You can convey a painting's message in the title in subtle ways without giving it all away,” she says. “We want viewers to connect and enjoy our works, without struggling to understand how the title relates to what they're viewing.”

THE WHOLE PACKAGE

The path to creating an award-winning pastel begins with technical craftsmanship, but that's not the end of the story. Jurors are looking for a work of art that captivates by catching the eye, stirring the mind or piercing the heart. Prizewinning paintings deliver “the whole package,” to quote Freeman. It's a tough assignment, but—not unlike the difficult task of jurying—there's pleasure to be found in the challenge. **PJ**

Amy Leibrock is a Cincinnati-based freelance writer and a regular contributor to Artists Network magazines.



Another Galaxy
(pastel on board,
24x24) by Cory Goulet

“You can convey a painting's message in the title in subtle ways without giving it all away.”

—CORY GOULET