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‘Ritual’ theme ties together art show at museum

Sonya Ellingboe / Nov 27, 2018

Own an Original exhibit features 46 works by 33 artists



“Rejoice,” a painting by Nathan Abel, won Best of Show in the 2018 “Own an Original” Exhibition at the Littleton Museum, through Jan. 6

When the annual call for artists went out for Littleton Fine Art Board’s annual Own an Original exhibit, submissions came in for considerably more than 200 works of art, from 68 Colorado artists.

Juror Joshua Feld, a recent addition to the faculty at Rocky Mountain College of Art and Design, spent hours in a dark room reviewing each entry — all supposed to explore the concept of “Ritual.” He selected 46 works by 33 artists to appear in the 2018 exhibit, which opened Nov. 16 and continues until Jan. 6 at the Littleton Museum.

Originally conceived by the Fine Arts Board as a showcase for Littleton artists, and fine craftsmen, the Own an Original show increasingly attracts artists from across the metro area and beyond.

Feld’s position as assistant professor of foundations and fine art and the self-described personal work — “a distinctly dream-like quality, utilizing familiar images — creates a highly surreal, poetic narrative” — is apparent in his choices for the longtime exhibit, which debuted in the 1960s. Feld said his judgment and awards focused on rituals: Mystical (the concert with religious overtones). Domestic and related to the artistic process — “In my own practice, coffee

comes before studio... I have a few little superstitions in the studio." Repetition gives a sense of comfort out of something serious, he said. Lithography is an example, with repeated images. (Note the third-place winner.)

The level of presentation in this show is increasingly more sophisticated, the selection of fine crafts is increasingly slimmer and OAO no longer seems like a gift-oriented exhibit. (As opposed to the new "Christmas Market" exhibit at Town Hall Arts Center, accompanying "Christmas Carol: the Musical," with a number of small paintings and crafts — ornaments, for example — which are clearly pointed in that direction and invite a visit.)

In addition to lots of entries, the exhibit always attracts a largely enthusiastic and mostly genial opening night crowd — with good weather an added plus factor on Nov. 15. The lobby and gallery were full and in constant motion.

Feld awarded the top Best of Show prize to Arapahoe Community College faculty member/painter Nathan Abels, who is listed as Coordinator: Art, Drawing, Design. Abels said his painting, "Rejoice," which hangs to the right of the gallery entrance, was from a series completed earlier this year, "that combined faith in technology with religious faith." (He had an exhibit, "History of the Future," at Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art.) "I worked from a photograph of an evangelical worship service/concert and an image of SpaceX rocket taking off. Many contemporary Americans are convinced that technology can and will alleviate any impending disaster, including climate change, fossil fuel dependence, hunger, poverty, etc." He went on to comment that "other pieces in the show have similar themes including a variation on traditional 'adoration' paintings where the wise man is kneeling over an iPad and a painting that substitutes flying drone arrangements for stars in the sky over a Stonehenge-like circle."

The Littleton Museum's exhibit curator Kevin Oehler had ample space to hang this exhibit and the lighting seemed especially effective to me. Each work invites a bit of the viewer's time to try to interpret an artist's thoughtful process in creating a message about ritual — several artworks include figures in

clearly ritualistic dress, such as First Place winner "The Nurturer of Ghost Birds," which Feld said "immediately grabbed my attention" to what at first might seem to be a portrait or pattern, but has a deeper meaning.

The First Place work, by Robyn Peterson, is a most engaging black-and-white depiction of a stern, obviously ritualistic figure. One can almost hear drumbeats behind him and picture an unseen crowd in front of him. Further contemplation will perhaps surface an architectural image in one's mind, where he might be surrounded by a massive structure and a gob-struck crowd.

Second Place award went to Michelle Lamb, Littleton, for her assemblage work, "Cultivation," which combines found metal items and other objects into a wall-hung composition, including a bouquet of metal roses surrounded by a bit of spiky stuff — tip of fencing, perhaps? Feld said he found a personal involvement with this one. He and his wife moved to Colorado from Massachusetts and bought an older home from an elderly woman who was a gardener. His wife asked him to trim the roses — a new experience — and he emerged from that unfamiliar assignment badly scratched! Trimming those roses just so is indeed a ritual, with some precise guidelines — and it dates back for centuries.

Third Place went to Johnny Plastini for his lithograph on paper: "Tachyons in Turbulence," in warm yellow, oranges, browns — in motion. (Tachyon — a hypothetical particle that always moves faster than light.)

Each of the winning works shows outstanding technique — total control of the media involved and excellent craftsmanship, as well as the general composition and design considerations. It's a rewarding show that invites a second visit — or more.

The Littleton Museum is at 6028 S. Gallup St., Littleton. Hours: 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesdays to Fridays; 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturdays; 1 to 5 p.m. Sundays. Admission is free and there are other exhibits to see, as well, including a pair of historic farms. 303-795-3950.