

The 11th Annual National Juried Exhibition

Juror's statement by Sarah Magnatta

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"Capturing the Present"

It is by now almost a cliché to state that the past two years have been marked by transformation and challenge, but one point remains: our recent collective experiences have unsettled our understandings of time. During the initial lockdown of 2020, as office spaces shifted to home and social gatherings were cancelled, many of us found ourselves considering time in new ways. Our old reliance on linear time as it appears in various human constructs—the 9-5 workday, the 5-day workweek, certain seasonal expectations—seemed to blur as we found ourselves scrambling to adjust our schedules and reimagine how we might better experience “time.” I am reminded of Daniel Buren’s statement about artist On Kawara and his obsessive view of time: “We are here witnessing a struggle and an extraordinary will, on the scale of a life, to capture the present.”

After I selected the final works for the 11th Annual National Juried Exhibition, this notion of “capturing the present” emerged as a unifying framework. In the video *No Answer*, the narrator begins by explaining a missed connection due to different time zones. We then peer into a separate room where a woman with a selfie stick is capturing the present in what appears to be a museum or sacred space—the past lives of the objects are juxtaposed with the present action, and time is conflated. Later, the narrator describes a past experience, but the image on the screen (with the presumption that the figure is a stand-in for the narrator) does not relate to that past experience; rather, we see (presumed) present actions and bear witness to the present moment. Pointedly, the narrator states to the recipient of the message, but also to us as viewers: “I don’t want to think about how much time will pass before we meet again.”

In *Slippage*, a woman appears to emerge from water (or, perhaps she is entering the water, or perhaps there is no water at all). The brushstrokes in the painting both obscure and reveal the image, the fractured nature of the composition challenging the viewer to complete the picture with our own understanding of what might be happening. The woman seems to gaze directly at us, pulling us into her present moment.

Line of Succession shows the past and present again colliding as we witness the reconsideration of hegemonic narratives and wonder how our collective memories have failed us. The missing faces reflect a longstanding tradition of iconoclasm in art history; whether intentional or not, the work is imbued with the ongoing controversies about problematic historical monuments. The erasure of the faces reflects a society grappling with the sins of the past and reminding us of the possibilities for the present.

Is there any symbol more apt to mark the impermanence of time than the flower? *Open Sesame* confronts the viewer with vivid colors and energy, the blooms almost appearing to enter the space of the gallery. Yet this moment is particularly vulnerable; the viewer recognizes the transience of the flower, of the scene, of the moment. The artists included in this exhibition, through a wide range of mediums and methods, have brought various notions of time to the fore. Though it may or may not have been the artists’ intention, I see these selections as particularly successful at “capturing the present.”

As always with juried exhibitions, I would be remiss not to remind the audience of the subjective nature of the process. I chose 26 artworks out of 63 submissions. Many outstanding works of art had to be excluded from this show, though their absence should not be viewed as an indicator of a lack of talent, originality, or interest. Additionally, though artists have become quite adept at photographing their work, judging artworks only through these photographs—a quite common practice for juried shows—undoubtedly leads to the omission of many remarkable works. I am in awe of the creativity of these artists and recognize the many hours of work they contributed to the process. I am honored to serve as juror for this exhibition and thank the organizers of the show for inviting me.