

AWARDS – Uniquely Fredericksburg, CRRL, October 2018

CRRL – Friday, October 5, 2018, 7 pm, Judge’s Talk

By Carrol Morgan, Curator, FCCA Frederick Gallery

Thank you to the Central Rappahannock Regional Library and Anna Lowry for inviting me to judge the 2018 Uniquely Fredericksburg Art Show. I was honored to be entrusted with the task of selecting awards for this display of work that represents each artist’s interpretation of what makes Fredericksburg a special place.

Fredericksburg is indeed unique, with its timeless Rappahannock River, historical buildings, a vibrant downtown, and people who have become the faces of our community. The bridges that connect the city to surrounding counties are more than structures, they are symbols of the past and present that delight us and provide viewpoints that cause us to ponder where we are, where we have been and where we are going. My award selections are based on my response to the images and narratives in addition to the formal qualities of the work and its presentation.

When judging this work, I looked for mastery of media, strong composition, presentation, and sensitivity to both traditional and contemporary concepts of thematic art. Presentation focuses the viewer on the art work without drawing undue attention to mat or framing—putting the artwork “on stage” is particularly important in a gallery setting such as this exhibit. A few works grabbed my immediate attention with their boldness, and other pieces invited close attention with a suggested narrative or layers of meaning.

When reviewing my award choices, I determined that a sense of scale played a role in my selections. Upon viewing the exhibit, my immediate attention was attracted to the grand scale of “One More Night” and the bold portrait of “Musician, Activist, Teacher”. Other smaller works such as “Store Fronts” caused me to stop and look closely at elements of color, subject or composition that demanded more attention or thoughtful contemplation. I will address each piece selected for recognition and explain my choices.

I awarded Best in Show to “One More Night” which presents three iconic architectural landmarks in a brilliant complementary color scheme of blues and oranges with a rhythmic placement of glowing street lights. The painterly brush strokes add immediacy to an impressionistic scene captured in those moments between sunset and darkness. The buildings of Fredericksburg form an historical narrative of permanence and change in keeping with the theme. The masterly handling of the media and sensitivity to a feeling of place makes this an outstanding painting.

NATURAL MEDIA AWARDS

In the category of natural media, I awarded 1st Place to “Store Fronts”, which represents a cool shaded view of reflected light on storefront windows and demonstrates amazing skill in the control of the media. The sense of place is familiar as a walk along the shops on Caroline Street, and the feeling of temperature and shade is captured in a strong composition of abstract vertical forms.

I awarded 2nd Place to “Musician, Activist, Teacher”, a bold, stylized contemporary portrait of a woman we all know, Gaye Adegbalola, as she embraces a column on the porch of a specific home. The reflection of another home presents a strong feeling of community. The vertical porch column presents the metaphor of “pillar” as in “pillar of the community” without any details of her celebrity. This is a powerful but understated portrait of a Fredericksburg icon whose contributions to music, activism and education have made a positive difference during the changing social structures of our time from the 60’s to present.

I awarded 3rd Place to “The Grand Railroad Bridge”, a unique close-up under view of the arches that support the structure with strong directional light and watery reflections. Most of us will never see this view, but it allows us to share in the painter’s experience. The tactile surface of the paints’ textures enhances the images of concrete, water and foliage.

The Honorable Mention award recognizes the portrait “Winter’s Coming”, an intimate portrait of a colonial woman as she stitches her quilt, seeming to be unaware of a viewer. Whether a costumed reenactor or a narrative from the past, this little painting has a sense of the historical context of what a woman’s idealized world was like, in early Fredericksburg. I particularly enjoy the rendering of the woman’s hand and the upward thrust of the cloth and how they fit into a complicated arrangement of colors, lines and forms. The composition, like a quilt, is an intricate interplay and joining of many parts.

DIGITAL/PHOTOGRAPHY

I would like to preface my selection of awards for Digital/Photography work. As I viewed the digital photography and modern printing techniques displayed in this exhibit, I released my long held opinion that canvas is for painting. After thoughtful reconsideration, I concluded that photos on canvas are legitimate if they show no pretense of being paintings. The advantages are that photo size is not limited and the print no longer needs a frame and matt or the distracting glare of glass between photo and viewer. Thank you, photographers for bringing me forward into your media world.

I awarded 1st Place to “Red Bench, City Dock”, a solitary snow covered bench in a pristine winter scene overlooking the silent and benign Rappahannock River in winter. A photographer ventured out to capture this lonely, cold, unoccupied red bench and presents a dock side image which most of us will not experience as we stay in our warm homes. The image is a beautiful study in the white of snow covered branches and the gray of the cold river punctuated by the slender red lines of the bench.

I awarded 2nd Place to “Johnny Johnson Celebration”, an insightful portrait of two young girls—one girl appears awkwardly aware that she is being photographed and the other girl is totally involved in the sunlight playing in her hands. The title brings this photo to a much higher level of narrative, as it connects the girls to a celebration for Johnny Johnson, an educator, activist and artist who has worked to insure that all children can aspire to be future leaders of their community and country. The photo makes me wonder if these girls know and understand why Fredericksburg is celebrating.

I awarded 3rd Place to “St. George’s Episcopal”, a photo that captures a quickly viewed pedestrian angle of this iconic downtown church, often seen as we rush along Princess Anne Street and look upward. It speaks to the uniqueness of this building that we instantly recognize it. The churches of Fredericksburg speak to us of the important role played by the congregants and religious leaders who have helped to mold the communities that make up our city. This photograph with its strong diagonals and recognizable features is like an unofficial city logo—we know that place.

The Honorable Mention award recognizes “Autumn Storm, Railroad Bridge”, a photograph that beautifully captures the most frequently photographed Fredericksburg bridge with luscious autumn colors and a full running river. How many of us gauge the Rappahannock River water level by the driftwood caught across the base of those arches? I selected this photograph for its excellence in every criterion; from its color relationships, composition and sharp definition to its lasting interest as a subject that constantly reminds us that we are in Fredericksburg.

In conclusion, viewing this exhibit provides a reflection of the many viewpoints and stories of Fredericksburg, a city which continues to foster an appreciation of the arts, of history and of its people who make a difference for the better.

Thank you and congratulations to all the artists who have presented their work for this exhibit. I hope that someone is archiving all the images from this and every Uniquely Fredericksburg exhibit, so these remarkable artworks can be enjoyed for years to come. They deserve a special lasting presence in this library.

Carrol Morgan