

Spring Bull Gallery
Out of the Blue 2023
Juror: Kevin Gilmore

Notes from the Juror

Dear Artists,

Thank you once again for trusting me to engage with your artwork with care and attention to all of the details, and with the mindfulness to interpret each nuance in your processes of making. I try to remain objective in my own process of seeing the work, yet I am always digging deeper to mine the gems of *your* subjectivity to discover the thoughts, feelings, and emotions that might have influenced your creative decisions. Keeping in mind that this is just one juror, my intention for the following writings is to justify in words, what caught my eye while choosing the winning artworks.

A word on *Out of the Blue*. The color blue is the first “clue” in the prompt for this exhibition. Not surprisingly, for a gallery located on Aquidneck Island, surrounded by the beautiful shorelines and waters of Narragansett Bay, the color blue dominated the group of submissions. In *Coastal Calm*, the artist left this blue clue in plain sight in the ropes attached to the mast of the boat. The calm waters and quiet reflections allow the viewer to enjoy the painting from afar. On closer inspection, those blue lines appear in a pleasant surprise.

In *Henry & Rose, Out of the Blue*, the ghostly figures overlap, smeared across an undefined time, like Gerhard Richter’s blurred paintings. The figures feel like memories, the silhouettes leave clues to the past: a brimmed hat of the male figure (Henry?) and the hairpiece of the female (Rose?) Speak to a time when folks dressed to the nines for Sunday church or traveling by train.

Both of these works, along with so many of the others effectively use the color blue. (I’ve also snuck past the limited number of awards I was able to give by *honorably mentioning* two works that were on my short list :)

“And what if one of the gods does wreck me out on the wine-dark sea?” - Homer, The Odyssey
The color blue is, debatably, a more recent color. Homer describes the sea as dark red, the color blue available to him at that time. Egyptian blue, Prussian blue, cobalt, indigo, and even the newest blue pigment YInMn Blue, the first new blue pigment in over 200 years, help artists create works about the seas, waves, winter shadows, and the skies. But the phrase “out of the blue” can transcend the idea of color. The phrase can also describe the unexpected - like a bolt of lightning that strikes out of a clear blue sky...

***First Place**

Cape Cod Curiosities, № .01, American Blue Lobster, Homarus americanus

Admittedly, I am not always immediately drawn to perfectionism. Leonard Coen famously said, “There is a crack in everything, that’s how the light gets in.” I often look for the imperfections, the break in a voice, a slightly out-of-tune guitar...But every time I’d walk past this watercolor, the beady eyes of the blue lobster seemed to follow. It is an extraordinary painting; precise, pristine, perfect. The framing and presentation is flawless. In the lack of background and the centered subject there is a calmness. I *feel* the meditation of the artist. I imagine the stillness in the studio during it’s making. They say it is a 1 out of a million chance of catching a blue lobster. The skill level, attention to detail, craftsmanship, presentation, subject - all of it is worthy of the blue ribbon.

***Second Place**

Reve Blue

No question this artist contemplated the prompt for this exhibition. Blue eyes, blue headscarf, blue background, even blue frame. The contrast of the blues against the skin color here is remarkable, complimentary. The figure's stare is almost unsettling, yet powerful, with tentative lips just barely parted, as if words are about to be spoken. The artist has provided a painting with such mystery. I often find the paintings of John Currin to read as misogynistic, the elongated necks and distorted female nude figures subservient to the artist. In *Reve Blue*, the female figure holds the power. She is Rosie the Riveter, on her day off, and in control. The paint handling here is delicate and detailed. The control of the blue paint, where the edges of the headscarf meet the background is executed with such care. The shine on the lips, reflections in the eyes, the eyelashes...reminds me of lyrics to the National (a band) song "Wasp Nest" - "You're cussing a storm in a cocktail dress, Your mother wore when she was young...Your eyes are broken bottles, And I'm afraid to ask...Get over here I wanna... Kiss your skinny throat...You're a wasp nest"

***Third Place**

Station

...and out of the blue appears this monotype titled *Station*. If there is a work in this exhibition that encapsulates the idea of the unexpected, it is this work. I was instantly captured (and confused) by the process. The Frankenthaler'esque freedom in the marks instantly captivated me. The diptych arrangement here (remember that Coen quote about the light coming through the cracks...) with the separated sheets down the middle was such a surprise. The subject feels repeated twice, but with the beauty of imperfection. It is not a carbon copy. The the 5 or 6 small objects change positions slightly. There is movement here, like looking down at the people moving about in Grand central Station from up on the mezzanine. It becomes two frames of an animation. The colors undulating between the two - the left more blue, darker outside the windows, the right lighter outside the arches - like the change in light over the course of a day. The scale is loose - these could be huge archways or small windows in a city flat. The artist allows the brushstrokes to remain, loose, expressive, nearly abstract, even musical...is that a grand piano in the middle, or a pile of magazines on a table? So much left open for the viewer to interpret. Such a beautiful, mysterious mono print.

***Honorable Mention**

Blue Serenity at Twilight

Trees can just be expressive simply being trees. Yet in *Blue Serenity at Twilight*, the group of deciduous late autumn trees, leaves lost, surround a smaller, single evergreen. The personification of this embrace is what sets this work apart. It is not simply a nature picture. It is a story - loving, caring, sensitive. The story I read here is reinforced but the medium. Colored pencil renders this twilight tale with repeated, with near pointillism-like patterns that peak out from beyond the trees. The horizon reads almost like the sea in the distance. There is poetry in the few dropped branches and the one lone oak leaf on the ground. Egon Schiele's trees have this quality as well. As if each one has a personality. *Blue Serenity* is sensitive in form and content, a heart-warming picture.

***Honorable Mention**

Big Blue

This winter scene is just...BOLD! While we know in our experience of New England winters that shadows cast during early mornings or late afternoons do not truly cast shadows on the snow with such intense blue, how silly it would be to judge this painting on whether it is "right" - that is the "wrong" blue. After all, these days we could simply snap a photo with our iPhone if we want to document the moment with color accuracy. It is what this artist portrays in the vastness of this cool blue shadow. It is commanding, overshadowing, yet somehow peaceful in the making of it. The artist takes us on a journey from traditional landscape painting, to modernist work like Yves Klein's *Blue Monochrome* (1961), and back again, leaving behind this trail. I read this painting as a study in near-abstraction, getting lost in the process of the making. *Big Blue* is a combination of the explosive color blue as well as unexpected non-representation. It is a bold, memorable painting!

***Judge's Award**

As The Tides Roll In

This award is bestowed upon this work made from "wood, copper nails, embroidery string, acrylic paint." The overall circle form sets it apart - becoming a 3-D sculptural painting. The warmth of the wood is allowed to exist between the paint strokes (poured paint?) "Waves" that crash - like seeing the coastline from a plane. The copper nails contrast with and the string. The intensity of the nailing is juxtaposed with the quietude of the string -wrapping. Ebbs and flows. High tides and low tides. The painting on the strings is delicate as well - like the different colors on a nautical map that describe water depth. It is a unique work in its making - fresh and unexpected.