

**Jennifer Landes, "Artists Do Still Live Here," *The East Hampton Star*, May 14, 2009**

### **Artists Do Still Live Here**

By Jennifer Landes

With 350 works double hung and sprawling out over every surface, the 71st annual Guild Hall Artist Members Exhibit is reminiscent of a Parisian salon, although far more democratic.



Two museumgoers check out Drew Shiflett's "#54," which won the top honors in Guild Hall's Artist Members Exhibit. – Photo by Durell Godfrey

Any member is allowed to bring a work to the show, the only restrictions being size: 20 by 25 inches for a wall piece and 30 by 30 by 20 inches for a sculpture. The exhibit always brings its surprises and often from artists who are not regularly shown. Just as often, however, the old familiar names may use the show to share something experimental or less commercially viable from a gallery's perspective.

**Awards are always determined by an outsider. This year, it was Jodi Hauptman, a curator in the Department of Drawings at the Museum of Modern Art. Ms. Hauptman seemed to favor a cool geometric abstraction with emphasis on linear and angular constructions. Her choice of a work on paper for top honors, Drew Shiflett's "#54," composed of graphite, ink, watercolor, and conte crayon on handmade paper, is perhaps not too surprising. It also shows an appreciation for the layered complexity of the work and the variety of choices the artist made in its execution. What is also very satisfying in this work is that the hand of the artist is a constant presence, whether in shaping the material or in laying down the precise design of the composition.**

For best work on paper, the winner was Christian Routh's "A Color Chart," in pencil. The piece resembles a well-ordered color chart of paint samples except that it is executed in various shades of gray. There is a conceptual element of irony that is playful and engaging in the work, but it also manages to attain formalism while gently mocking it.

Even the photograph by Mary Ellen Bartley that Ms. Hauptman chose as best, which depicts a pile of paperback books, works in the same aesthetic heritage. The image gains interest by focusing the viewer's attention on the variations of color in the pages from book to book and from the slightly askew placement here and there that creates more interesting angles.

The same might even be said for Dennis Leri's piece of metal and paint fitted and screwed to a panel or stretcher. Called "59 Golden Rod Yellow," presumably for the yellow paint that the artist has applied to the metal in a loose composition, the work fuses uneven strips of metal to form a larger work of steady proportions. It joins sculpture and painting, once again toying with formalist strictures, but adds a freer hand both in the application of color and in the bold color itself.

Other award winners included Claire Heimarck for best abstract painting, Frederic Paxton Werner for best representational work, Sally Richardson for best sculpture, and Jane Johnson for best landscape. The honorable mentions included work by Tulla Booth, Miriam Dougenis, Grant Haffner, John Hattieberg, Kryn Olson, Justin Peyser, and Joan Semmel.

I would have added Philippe Cheng's chromogenic print, "Untitled, Sagaponack," to that list for its moody layering of just-out-of-grasp forms and atmosphere. But its abstraction is romantic and moody and almost devoid of any geometry or hard lines.

Extremely ordered but perhaps too vibrant, too pop, and too real is David Disick's "46th and 6th," a photograph of the back of a hot dog truck that captures the zing of a James Rosenquist without the detached remove. It might be too easy or too much for some circles, but it forces a reconsideration of subject that is aesthetically invigorating nonetheless. Works by Barbara Gerard, Jim Gemake, Audrey Lee, Lynn Matsuoka, Jeff Muhs, Mark Seidenfeld, and Charles Waller also stood out in unique ways.

The sheer profusion of entries should lay to rest any doubts that artists do not live here anymore. Including prices with each piece adds a certain casual charm that a stuffer institution would never consider. Here, it serves to remind us that Guild Hall is in temperament a gathering place of working artists first and a more staid repository for their output second.

Despite such a jumble of styles and mediums, the members show is a good one and will offer something for everyone, and a chance to buy affordable art to support a South Fork working artist. It is on view through May 30.