

Pat Rogers, "A Show That's Fun and Exciting," *The Southampton Press*, April 30, 2009

A Show That's Fun and Exciting

by Pat Rogers

Spring has definitely sprung: Guild Hall has opened the 2009 edition of its annual Artist Members Exhibition, welcoming a cross-section of East End artists and giving each of them space on the walls of the East Hampton museum.

Anyone who is a member of Guild Hall can exhibit, and the show is renowned for attracting renowned artists as well as those trying to make their mark.

"This is our tribute to the great artists we have on the East End," said Ruth Appelhof, executive director of Guild Hall, in remarks that opened the award ceremony on Saturday.

Guild Hall Museum director/chief curator Christina Strassfield elaborated: "I've been quoted as saying that this is my favorite show," she told the crowd gathered in the lobby, "It's true. This is my favorite show and every year the work gets better and better."

Part of the fun stems from examining picks singled out for awards by a juror from a prestigious art organization. His or her selections always make for lively conversations among those at the opening. The opening is also known for drawing area artists out of seclusion in their studios to catch up with their creative colleagues and see if the long winter has brought about any changes.

"This is always a fun show," said exhibiting artist Miriam Dougenis, the winner of an honorable mention for her oil painting of Deerfield Road, "Roadscape."

"You get to see what your artist friends have been working on during the winter," Ms. Dougenis said. "The show is always exciting."

Exhibiting artist Cynthia Sobel agreed separately. She has participated in the Artist Members Exhibition for the last five years. "It's great to see your work hanging with other artists'—you get to see what they've been up to," she said. "It's a great community; there are so many talented artists."

This year's installment followed the traditional pattern. The 71st annual Guild Hall Artists Members Exhibition opened on Saturday amid a bevy of other area art events. For the past two years, the renovation of Guild Hall's galleries and the John Drew Theater created a space crunch that necessitated presenting the show in two installments, dividing exhibiting artists by name into two halves of the alphabet. Because of limited gallery access, crowds at these shows spilled out to the outer entrance of Guild Hall.

With the renovation complete, full access was restored and ample space was provided for viewing some 350 artworks. Many people commented on the more airy feel of the space, and the way the works were arranged by curators among the galleries.

"It's a beautiful show," said sculptor Dorothy Frankel. "Guild Hall did a nice job."

The Members Show drew a mix of paintings, sculpture, photography and mixed media works. Each artist member is allowed to submit one work. Most are for sale, with proceeds split between the artist and Guild Hall. The Members Show includes artwork by a wide range of artists, including Bill King, Connie Fox, Marc Klionsky and Joan Semmel. Stephanie Brody-Lederman, Jane Martin, Paton Miller, Eric Ernst and Tracy Harris are artist members at Guild Hall with works on view, as are Kevin Teare, Gloria Kisch, Jeff Muhs, Carol Hunt, Sheila Isham, Christa Maiwald, Charles Waller, David Gamble and literally hundreds of other artists, some whose names are more familiar than others.

The guest juror was Jodi Hauptman, curator of the Department of Drawings at the Museum of Modern Art. Prior jurors have included art critics, museum directors and museum curators from such institutions as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Guggenheim Museum, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the New Museum of Contemporary Art, the Brooklyn Museum of Art and others.

The best in show winner receives a solo show at Guild Hall. Recent winners have included Jane Martin, Rima Mardoyan and Darius Yektai. This year's winner is Drew Shiflett, who won for the work, "Untitled #54," a mixed media piece using graphite, ink, watercolor and conte crayon on handmade paper. In a statement to Guild Hall, Ms. Hauptman wrote of her choice, "I was intrigued by the way the artist emphasized the material aspects of the work of art ... the many mediums used, the handmade paper and the actual putting together of the pieces. It made me want to see more of this artist's work."

The Best Work on Paper was awarded to Christian Routh, who submitted a drawing of "paint color swatches like those found in hardware stores designed to re-create textural surfaces." The piece is part of a series that includes textural musings using used matchbooks and erasers, he said.

Best Mixed Media went to Dennis Leri for his work using aluminum and metallic car paint, "59 Ford Goldenrod Yellow." The piece is part of the series, "50s Optimism," that channels the first colored cars available for the masses after World War II. The series will be exhibited at Peter Marcelle Contemporary in Southampton this summer.

The winner of the Catherine and Theo Hios Best Landscape Award was Jane Johnson. Best Abstract went to Claire Heimarck and Best Representational Work was awarded to Frederick Paxton Werner for his portrait of a young woman. The winner for Best Photograph was Mary Ellen Bartley and Best Sculpture went to Sally Richardson.

Honorable Mentions went to Justin Peyser, John Hattleberg, Kryn Olson, Joan Semmel, Tulla Booth, Miriam Dougenis and Grant Haffner. The award winners will be featured in a gallery talk at Guild Hall on Saturday, May 2, at 3 p.m., to be hosted by Michelle Klein, curatorial assistant/registrar, who organized the Artist Members Exhibition.

The show will remain on view through May 30. Guild Hall is open Fridays and Saturdays from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. and on Sundays from noon to 5 p.m. The museum is located at 158 Main Street.