

*Matthew Neil Gehring, a special juror in honor of USI's 50th Anniversary, selected the artworks for the exhibit. He is an Evansville native who graduated from North High School and USI, (BS, Art, 1998), and earned an MFA in Ceramics from the University of Delaware. He currently is the Chair of the Visual Arts Department and Director of the Flecker Gallery at SUNY Suffolk, Long Island, New York.*

## **Juror's Statement**

In my role as an artist-curator I spend months and even years building a vision for a show and working with one or several artists to determine what we will show and how to show it. There are many discussions and changes over time. Jurying a student show is a very different experience. The jurors task in a show like this one is, in one day, to eliminate 60-70% of submissions or more in order to make a show that fits well in the gallery and that celebrates the most highly ambitious and accomplished pieces.

In this process there were many pieces that were very good, demonstrating merit and skill that did not make the cut. There were many difficult decisions to say the least. Demonstration of technical skill was abundant, but this is not the only thing that counts. In my view, it is not necessarily even a requirement, but usually helps a great deal. We learn to draw so that we can learn to see form and space. Drawing advances our ability to generate a unique vision. Painting teaches us to see and understand color in much greater depth. Sculpture and Ceramics teach us to engage with and understand the language of form and its relationship to human scale and experience. All of the creative forms are channels through which we give sensory expression to idea or experience; to make the intangible tangible.

What am I looking for when jurying a student art show? What makes artistic merit? I am looking for some combination of the following:

- Creativity in its most pure forms, free from derivation, a sense of inventive-ness and original thinking
- Artistic ambition
- Developed sensitivity in material handling - not necessarily the same thing as technical ability
- Avoidance of clichés
- Artworks that take a critical stance in relation to the culture at large
- Developing artistic maturity

All of the award winners possess most, if not all of these qualities. Many works that were eliminated were very well executed, but failed to transcend mere technique. Many demonstrated ambition and astute material handling but were also clichéd and/or unoriginal. Many had some combination of strong aspects, but also glaring weaknesses or unresolved areas.

It is also worth mentioning that my approach is not to simply find and select works that I “like”, or that meet my taste. There were pieces I eliminated that I liked, and pieces that were included that do not suit my taste or preferences in art. I work to suspend my own taste and preferences in this activity and to identify merit according to the criteria mentioned above. Having said this, taste plays an inevitable and important role. I have heard these questions repeatedly in my career: Isn't art entirely subjective? What qualifies me (or anyone) to make judgments of quality in art?

No, evaluation in art is not entirely subjective, but subjectivity plays a part and it is important. Subjectivity is essential to aesthetic discernment. These selections are certainly the result of my considered evaluation, and that's the point. I have chosen to live in an art pressure-cooker. For 20 years, I have lived a life immersed in art. My palette is seasoned by more than two decades of art making, exhibitions, studio visits, museum visits, curating in NYC and elsewhere, including the gallery I

direct at the college where I am a professor and department head. I have had more than 3,000 students in my classes over the last 15 years and have evaluated, graded, or awarded tens of thousands of student artworks. These experiences are deep and ongoing and form the basis of my aesthetic discernment and sensibilities. Exposure to the judgments of professionals with well-seasoned aesthetic discernment (in addition to your faculty) is one of the most valuable and important aspects of challenging and developing your own sensibilities. This is true even when, perhaps especially when, it doesn't go your way.

I want to congratulate everyone for having the courage to submit works. It was my honor to jury the show and select the award winners for this exhibition at my alma mater, a show that I have participated in, been rejected from, and won awards in. Special congratulations go out to the award winners; these were truly excellent works. To everyone who got cut, remember this: Thick skin is important. Most applications result in disappointment. As a student artist, if you are successful at 10 percent of your applications to various opportunities, you are doing well. Cultivate patience. Perseverance is the most essential attribute in finding success.

Good luck to you all.

Best,  
Matthew Neil Gehring '98, Juror  
USI 45th Annual Juried Student Art Exhibition