GUIDELINES FOR JUDGING PAINTINGS

In an attempt to fairly and properly judge representational paintings, it is recommended that the juror (for an art show or competition) consider both sides of the painting, the objective and subjective.

**Idea:** The first consideration might be about whether the piece speaks on an emotional level. Does it create a convincing mood? Is there some intriguing mystery or does it achieve an intangible richness? How successful is the overall idea? Is the artist’s interpretation of the subject generally successful? Opinions on these more subjective considerations may vary widely from one juror to the next, depending on personal taste, and the level of understanding and experience of the juror.

The technical considerations are only a little more easily determined. From a more objective standpoint, a responsible juror will also consider the technical merits of a painting.

**Design and Composition:** Is the design interesting or static? Does the composition support the design effectively and is there an interesting/unequal division of positive and negative space? Is there a simple arrangement of the main masses with a clear dominant feature? Is there an effective lead-in to the focal point? Does the painting draw you in, either boldly or with a whisper?

**Values:** Has the artist controlled the values or manipulated them in an interesting way? Do the values contribute to a sense of depth in the painting? Value control is a mature trait.

**Drawing:** Is the drawing good? Is the perspective correct and consistent throughout? Is there good proportion from one mass to another? Good shape language? Do the shapes have weight. Is there good gesture or lyrical quality? Does it flow, or does it look stiff and forced. Also a mature trait.

**Color:** Is there a convincing sense of depth, perhaps richer in the foreground and more gray in the background? Does the color scheme support the overall mood of the painting? Is the color exciting or is it simply out of control? Are there interesting combinations of warms and cools? Could everything in the painting exist under the same light source - are the temperature relationships believable?

**Paint Quality – Edges and brushwork:** What about the surface treatment? Are the brushstrokes confident or tentative? Are all the brushstrokes the same, causing a static effect, or is there an interesting variety in the length and size of the strokes? Does the brushwork lend itself to the subject, does it create a believable sense of light and atmosphere? Is it robust or formulaic? Is there a variety of different edges? Are there some wonderful thick and thin passages? (oils and acrylics).

It is recommended that a summation or final assessment be made from the proper viewing distance for the size painting being judged. Step back again and see if it works on the whole.

In the end, the jurying/judging process will always be somewhat subjective. None of us can escape our own personal preferences or current levels of understanding. However, a responsible juror can attempt to assess from all the major vantage points for each work considered.

Ultimately, the juror must answer the question, how well did the artist achieve that delicate balance between inspiration and skill? **Both** must be evident for a painting to succeed as art.

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