

'Hoping for the Possible' by Preston Metcalf

Hope. It was an interesting word to keep coming up in the jurying process of an art competition. Not a word one would expect to be the focus of so much discussion, and, yes, excitement, particularly in reference to a submitted painting. To be sure, there were other words in play that day – technique, style, skill, media, etc. – but it was the word hope that captured our attention as we stood arrested before the work of Holly Van Hart, and one painting in particular, Possibilities Abound.

The “we” in question were the Curatorial team of the Triton Museum of Art: Preston Metcalf, María Ester Fernández, and Stephanie Learmonth. Every year the Triton Museum of Art hosts a statewide art competition, the focus changing from year to year. This year it was a general painting competition, all painting media, styles, and themes open. It was a big competition that year, with more than 900 entries, out of which about 80 were selected for inclusion in the exhibition. The works were in and the show was installed, ready for the opening reception two days later. Now was the moment of truth. The Best of Show, place winners, and honorable mentions are not selected in the Triton competitions during the selection process. We wait until the work is on the wall and lit for exhibition so that we can give each piece a most favorable viewing before determining awards. So it was when each of the jurors came face to face with Possibilities Abound.

We, the jurors, had already been dazzled by still lifes of striking detail and realism; landscapes that were exquisitely rendered; portraiture of amazing realism and expressionism; and abstractions of powerful emotion and mystery, but it was Possibilities Abound, a painting of a nest with three eggs nestled inside, that kept drawing us back.

What was it about this painting that compelled us so? This deceptively simple work of a nest, cast somewhat to the edge of the canvas was, first of all, well-rendered. The brush execution was loose and confident, with color and texture suggesting as often as it explicitly portrayed. The use of color and texture was lively and engaging.

The composition was simple, the asymmetrical positioning of the nest adding interest to our view, but none of these, alone or together are what set this particular work apart. It was that one word ... *hope*.

While each of the jurors were impressed with the evident skill of Holly Van Hart, it was the powerful infusion of meaning into this otherwise simple composition that made it impossible for us to ignore. The cradled eggs would seem to be the vehicle for the perceived meaning of this work, but that is not the case. It is the nest itself, twigs and sticks intertwined, no single strand revealing its ultimate connection to the others, yet connected they all are. And in these concealed and revealed connections, the jurors (each of us quite independently) came away with the feeling that we are not to identify with the eggs, the seeming vessels of opportunity, but that we are each metaphorically a strand or twig that combines

with our fellow beings to find the opportunities that abound when we realize that we are all connected, like the twigs of a nest, and that together we nurture both our potentialities and the potential hopes for those that will follow. This painting was, after all, about us!

In this exhibition you will see more than nests. Ribbons tumble and weave, touching, supporting, spinning away and into its fellow strands, just like the twigs of a nest, which are – we believe – but suggestions of our human connectedness. In other works, branches and leaves create a visual net wherein this same message is revealed. It is work that is powerful in its simplicity and message of human connectivity.

Thousands of people visited the Triton Museum of Art's Statewide Painting Competition exhibition and saw Holly's work. Did they see what we saw? Will they see it now? We can only hope.

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