

JUROR'S STATEMENT / *ART OF PAPER*
AD GALLERY / UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA PEMBROKE

I was delighted to serve as the juror for the *Art of Paper* Exhibition at AD Gallery, University of North Carolina Pembroke. It was also my pleasure to select the three top awards. To all the artists who submitted work; thank you for the opportunity to view so many distinctive works. To the artists selected; congratulations. As an artist, who works with paper and as a curator, who organizes exhibitions focused on paper, I was keen to discover what others are doing with this versatile medium. After careful consideration, I ultimately chose works that manipulated paper beyond the substrate. I also focused on qualities that revealed the hand of the artist in the making. While this curatorial decision framed my decisions, I would note, a different juror could have easily chosen other works for an entirely different and equally gratifying exhibition.

Whether the pieces were large or small, several overlapping themes focused on identity, reclamation, and fragility emerged through the use of collage, papercutting, and sculpture. As such, recycled materials were often an integral component in many of the works. For instance, the intimate collages of **Laura Stein**, contain images of women obscured by overlays of industrial diagrams culled from old textbooks and auction catalogs. As such, they are subtle contemporary statements on gender equality. The quiet works of **Annemarie Coffey** also address issues of autonomy. By referencing film stills from Cassavetes' "A Woman Under the Influence", one wonders if these lovely layered interiors are sanctuaries or prisons of a mind burdened by madness or restricted by social norms. Similarly engaging, **Heather Whidden** stitches a quirky, but powerful feminine figure with thread into an allegorical scene of motherhood. Also referencing time honored "woman's work", **Kristina Lyle** creates stunning quilt like collages by weaving strips of castoff cut paper into bold geometric patterns and grids. In contrast, **Elaine Abbe's** mixed media collage combines decorative pattern, bold color, and hand torn organic shapes that resonate with jazz. While less traditional, **Jaynie Crimmins** obsessively rolls and sews shredded junk mail into dense textural sculptures that address our culture's rampant consumerism. Likewise **David Garratt** employs found detritus scavenged from the streets or salvaged from cleanup operations. Equally raw and humorous, his piece calls to mind a drowned rat in the aftermath of a flood, as well as the childhood game of pin the tail on the donkey. More narrative in nature, **Margaret DeLima's** sculptural reliquaries contain memories that unpack cultural bias. Likewise, **Laura Post's** mask-like portraits present the complex self in opposition to the superficial "selfie". In a similar fashion, **Aaron Pennington** ironically juxtaposes a simulated emotion (emoji) with laborious drawing and hand cut text. In contrast, **Sally Schluter Tardella** uses the house as a metaphor of the body, in which plumbing and ventilation conduits echo digestive, pulmonary, and reproductive systems. Perhaps based on memories culled from private spaces, these works suggest stereotypes governed by domestic limitations. By comparison, **Molly Bosley's** expansive papercuts deceptively present the beauty of nature in a fairytale world undermined by a dreamlike narrative of apocalyptic proportions. While also using organic forms cut into paper, **Barbara Bernstein** allows the material (or lack of it) to determine the ultimate form. Delicate interplays of light and shadow create intricate readings of space. Less is more, is also the defining characteristic of **Kim Faler's** piece. Deceivably simple, the artist fabricates paper out of clay. Curled edges and irregular shapes further the subtle illusion of an artist's quick sketches tacked to the wall. Likewise pushing the practical limitations of paper, **Hong Hong's** piece is an impressive expansion upon traditional Japanese methods. Poured outdoors on a large handmade mold, her work maps complex fluctuations in weather and place through a simple material magically transformed.

Ultimately, one wants one's art to be memorable. As the viewer, I want to experience the world through someone else's eyes. Like visual poetry, good work should reveal something new, challenge preconceptions, and enhance our lives. Technique alone was not enough for me to include a piece; rather I was guided by the artist's vision in combination with their expertise. I was drawn to work that prompted me to see or interpret the subjects in a new and fresh way. Ultimately, I looked for surprise and nuance, seeking unique images that remained with me long after the jury process was over.

Reni Gower is a Professor in the Painting and Printmaking Department at Virginia Commonwealth University. She has been a practicing artist for over 30 years. She also curates award winning traveling exhibitions.