

Thoreau-ly Natural
Artel Gallery
Lauren Woods, Juror's Statement
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I was honored to serve as juror for Artel Gallery's first show of the year, *Thoreau-ly Natural*. It was my first time on this side of an exhibition, and it was no easy task with a record number of entries. As a fellow artist, I would like to commend everyone on taking the chance of entering the show. Now that I have experienced the role of juror, I realize that whether or not a piece is chosen can be up to a variety of circumstances, and does not necessarily pertain to the piece as an isolated element, but rather as a part of a greater whole.

Upon entering the gallery, I was met by nearly 200 artworks in a wide range of styles and media. With my first walk-through, I determined that in order to not spend the night at the gallery I needed to quickly make connections among the works in order to curate a cohesive and engaging exhibition. Luckily I had the thematic guidance of Thoreau to narrow things down a bit further. Keeping in mind ideas from his writing that focus on solitude, contemplation of nature, and transcendental quality of the soul, I began to center on pieces that I felt captured poetic appearances from the natural world. As I gradually picked pieces, I began to see works that created a dialogue when placed together. What I found most interesting became how some seemed as if they were made in the same locations although they were by different artists. This to me becomes the idea of the "collective conscience," which can be compared to the transcendental belief of all souls being connected through nature. In addition to this idea, I also became interested in finding pieces in which technical aspects such as medium and application matched the themes and imagery. In this way the artist becomes like a force of nature bringing forth the work. Hopefully one can observe these ideas while viewing the exhibition.

When choosing the awards I was drawn back to things that caught my eye initially in the process. One of the first pieces I saw when entering the gallery was Mary Lou Nicolai's acrylic painting *View from Below*. I was drawn to the delicacy of the paint washes that suggested the physical atmosphere of water. Another piece that captured my attention upon first glance included Jane C. Nowlin's watercolor *Wilderness Stream*. It instantly reminded me of Paul Cezanne's work with its stylized and geometrically solid forms that all fit together as if a part of a puzzle. He too was interested in interpreting nature in a new way for his time, trying to see its underlying geometric essentials in order to find truth within his perception of it. Something that made me look more closely while walking through included Ashley Thornton's collection of found objects *The Nature of our Nature*. It reminded me of my almost "Walden-esque" childhood spent growing up in a rural area of Mobile, Alabama collecting and organizing "treasures" from outside. This was an idyllic time before the internet brought the world to my home, where I can remember having a sense of time that was not so rushed and regimented and the physical things collected had a sense of deeper meaning. Don Manderson's *Dispersant's Child Digital* is kind of the opposite feeling of that piece, where digitally collected pictures create an ominous mood of man's effect on nature and the influence of technology on how we perceive images. With digital access to so many pictures from so many places at any time we have almost lost a sense of any type of meaning associated with them. Furthermore, we have gotten to the point where we almost don't even look at the environment we are within because we are trying to capture the perfect photograph or status update about it. This is where Thoreau's belief that society and its institutions can corrupt the purity of the individual could come to mind.

The final piece I want to write about is Pat Page's *Shepsoo* in which I awarded best of show. Although it would not be what most would consider a show-stopping piece, I felt its quiet and contemplative character was an ideal embodiment of some of Thoreau's ideas. Visually it reminded me of both a human heart and branches of a tree, or parts of a stream, and conceptually it made me think of man's dependence on nature despite the history of us trying to conquer it. It remained poetic to me throughout the evening because it could imply so many things without adhering to one particular idea. Most importantly it seemed to suggest the issue that life and nature flow within us and without us, which becomes a consistent theme in the search for meaning and truth in our existence.

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