

## 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. Jurying *That Which Surrounds You* was a very different experience.

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. 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 an 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
- Expressing the feeling of the in time temporal pandemic living

Many works that were eliminated were very well executed. I gravitated towards the narrative of time-based works, food, solitude, and melancholic timeline artworks. I scored artworks higher based on color, textures, concepts, media and storytelling. I didn't invest time in commentary simply because of the sheer volume of artwork.

I found all the artwork submitted poignant and deeply meaningful. I wish we had more time to do a more in-depth analysis of the artwork. I recognize the historical significance of these pieces. I consciously avoided literalism and cliché topics from my perspective.

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 San Francisco and elsewhere. I have had more than 1,000 students in my classes over the last 15 years. 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. To everyone who got cut, remember this: Over 770 people submitted to this exhibition. Cultivate patience. Perseverance is the most essential attribute in finding success. You all made it to submit art during a pandemic! Congratulations on all your efforts.

Good luck to you all.

Best,  
Juror Asya Abdrahman