

March 20, 2023

Dear Benicia Artists:

I thank you for inviting me to be a part of this exhibition. It is an honor, and it has been a huge pleasure to pour through the works submitted. The process of viewing them online meant that I would first see the images as small thumbnails before pulling them up to full size, and very often there was a great first moment of amazement with the large image of a work appearing that was much more complex and interesting than I had expected from the thumbnail. Every submission was a surprise and interesting. I only wish I had been able to see them in person, but I will say that the quality of the images and the website interface were quite good, allowing for time to peruse the images and see them in detail.

So many of these projects were intelligent, personal, meaningful, and touching. Many dealt with personal experiences, family, and social issues that the artists felt strongly about. Their sincerity was evident.

Others explored techniques such as printmaking or photography with more a bend on the process and learning. In those cases, it was great to see a variety of works or detailed photos in which the experimentation and learning processes were apparent. As an untrained printmaker myself, I am aware of the difficulties of printing and the possibilities it also presents, though experimentation is required to learn the tricks of the craft.

Some artists strived almost too hard to encapsulate huge historical themes or complex social issues, I think from a feeling that Art needs to be About Something. While I believe art is a form of communication, there are many levels of meaning and emotion that can be transmitted through one's work. Beware of being overly simplistic and relying on cliched imagery - just because you borrow or portray a potent image from somewhere else doesn't mean the work necessarily achieves the same potency as the source, unless it is somehow activated in one's work.

Some submissions were single works, not part of a larger series that was apparent, and those were much harder to get a sense of in terms of concept and purpose. Also, it was a disadvantage to artists who failed to include any sort of statement about their work. So often the statements were very helpful in learning about the concepts and ideas behind pieces, so I would encourage artists to learn to write about their works and to do so when the opportunity arises. It is not necessary to use art-speak, just plain language about where your ideas come from and what one hopes to convey through their works.

Art is not a contest - it's always awkward to evaluate works that are personal and meaningful to the maker. All in all, my biggest worry is that I selected too many works to be included in the exhibition. I hope the process was helpful and encouraging for all the artists who submitted work.

Thank you for the opportunity to experience your creations.

Sincerely,
Sandow Birk