



## NATIONAL EXHIBITION JUROR OF AWARDS STATEMENT PATRICK SAUNDERS OPAM

I have to admit that I was surprised when Jeremy called and asked me to juror this show. A call like that forces a person to consider just what it is that you bring to the table that would make your choices any more valid than that of anyone else. Like most painters, I question my decisions in my own paintings every day.

I believe that the key to jurying any show is the juror’s experience in art history. Yes, I do look for technical expertise, which is essential in any endeavor. But that skill set falls flat unless an artist has something to say, a voice, some reason for choosing to paint a specific subject or even to engage in the very act of

painting itself. This “story” can be narrative, but it could also be the expression of emotion, mood or simply an appeal to any or all of our five senses, despite the fact that this is a visual medium. Then, there’s what we, as the viewers, bring to the experience. The interpretive story can often go well beyond the artist’s intention. Just as in music, certain songs are tied to personal memories, and each time we hear that song, moments from our past are recalled. Paintings too can tell different stories depending on the viewer’s personal experience both in life and in art. No two people would choose exactly the same list of winners from all of the excellent paintings in this show, but I’m the one lucky enough to share what I found personally inspiring.

The Gold Medal was awarded to a piece that immediately grabbed me, and I just kept coming back to it over the course of six hours of exploring each and every piece in the exhibition. It’s a smaller piece. Understated. Scale can be a distraction in a show like this one, and I feel that a juror has a duty to view each and every piece equally, regardless of the initial impact based on size or other factors. In this painting, I first noticed the excellent design - simple shapes, confident brushstrokes and paint application. The colors set a mood - bright and saturated in some areas and muted in others, and yet they all flow together, working towards the whole. The piece immediately brings to mind some of my favorite floral works by Australian painter Arthur Streeton. And then, there’s the sense of story I get from the painting, told through the most simple of elements. I could not know the intention of the artist, but a painting created with emotion tends to exude emotion. For me, the piece suggests the cycle of life. There’s a juxtaposition of melancholy and joy, an ending and a beginning. It makes me feel happiness and sadness at the same time.

Following the awards presentation, Inga reached out to me via email, letting me know that my assumptions about her work were right on. Not only was her painting a message of hope, it was painted in the garden of a Ukrainian woman, taking my initial impression of the depth of the story even deeper. When we as artists inject our emotions into our work, the effect is undeniable. The viewer feels it as well, and in the case of this painting, I felt it from moment one.

Congratulations to everyone who exhibited work in the show. It takes courage to put your voice on canvas for others to see and judge.



Mystery Mini Paintings



Jurors of Awards Patrick Saunders OPAM and Todd Casey with 2025 National Award winners in attendance at the National Convention



Vino with the Vendors