



# Taking on “The Figure” in Juried National Show at East End Arts

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by James Croak

It's like tuning into a radio station while driving across a strange state. Lots of twisting and pauses, listening for something resembling the culture from whence one departed. There are stations with worried crop reports, broadcasts of vapid Muzak, high pitched gospel evangelists, talk shows with octogenarians reminiscing about the Lennon sisters, municipal proceedings over a sewage plant, a mélange of audio graffiti that one is only vaguely aware even exists.

And then the dial finally lands on one that feels familiar, one to accompany the next 50 miles. Such is the experience of viewing the juried art exhibition that attracted 714 entries, 55 of which were judged worthy of wall space at the East End Arts “4th Annual National Show (2015)” in Riverhead, NY.

This year's theme is “The Figure.” The entries were juried by two experienced gallery owners, [Kathryn Markel](#) and [Peter J. Marcelle](#), both of whom operate high-end galleries under their own names.

The work is installed salon style, a euphemism for “fairly crowded,” and is expectedly uneven by contemporary art standards. In this art world equivalent of an actors' cattle call, it would be unrealistic to anticipate a single elevated standard for works accepted by the judges .

One curious—and encouraging—thing to take away from this show is that 165 years after photography displaced portraiture, people still love to paint, and to dab the figure, en masse. The 714 entries represent acres of studios, thousands of brushes and barrels of paint, all put in the service of rendering a human being in pigment on a flat surface. It is a compelling act that survives every theoretical hegemony and technical invention that attempts to dispose of it. But I digress.

The [Diana DeSantis](#) painting, *John*, was adjudged Best in Show by the aforementioned gallery owners. It is a handsome portrait of an older man, backlit and rendered with convincing skin tones. The painting does not seem to have a raison d'être though, and profiles are the easiest types of portraiture. Still, it has a good balance of color and is laid out well, so one can see real merit in the work of this artist from Whitestone, NY.



“John” by Diana DeSantis.

First place went to [Kristen Hadjoglou](#) of Eastport for her oddity, *When Painters Go Bowling*, portraying two individuals arm wrestling. Although the layout, simple blotchy colors, and added text reads art school to me, it is an attractive piece.



“When Painters Go Bowling” by Kristen Hadjoglou.

Second place went to a first-rate painting by [Toby Haynes](#) from Cornwall, England (lest anyone think portraiture is a local phenomenon). It’s a bit of a mystery piece, clever, and enjoyable to view: a woman is searching for something under the bed. This is a subject that has not enjoyed much examination in the fine arts but works here just fine.



“Search Mode” by Toby Haynes.

The colors might take some getting used to but the patterns are effective and both composition and subject show experience.

Lots of humor is in evidence in the show, as with the row of mannequins that garnered third place, titled *Waiting Room* by [Anica Shpilberg](#) of Sunny Isles Beach, FL. The continual arguing about which camera system is best is easily settled by the statement “the one you have with you.”

I suspect *Waiting Room* was an iPhone shot: it is neither lit nor edited, nor does it seem to have been taken with a high-end camera, but it’s great. An involving image of idealized bodies, it is ridiculous through and through, as well as socially poignant. The mannequins seem to be waiting for something with their vacant stares; a commendable image.



“Waiting Room” by Anica Shpilberg.

Also from Shpilberg is another mannequin shot, one more shrill, weirdly sculpted with way-too-large breasts and an open, apparently shouting mouth. Entitled *Really Gladys?* it looks to be the response

from someone if a friend had inserted some unnecessary balloons in her chest. I had to wonder about the purpose and use of such a mannequin, which seems a littler closer to one of those adult Judy Dolls than a clothes model.



“Really Gladys?” by Anica Shpilberg.

There are four dozen other works in the show. While many were submitted by artists from as near as the Hamptons and around Long Island, many came from across the U.S., from states as far away as California, Colorado, Utah, North Carolina and Florida, to name a few. Of the works on view, there are several that rise to the level of this reviewer’s idea of what constitutes an artwork. Perhaps more importantly, all show a love of painting and portraiture by their makers.

**BASIC FACTS:** The 4th Annual National Show (2015), a juried two-dimensional art exhibition on the theme of “The Figure,” is exhibited from August 7 to September 23, 2015 at East End Arts, 133 East Main St., Riverhead, NY 11901. [www.eastendarts.org](http://www.eastendarts.org).

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