



ART REVIEW: 2016 Long Island Biennial Reveals Artists' Many Strengths

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by Charles A. Riley II

Biennials are not necessarily “nice.” For one example, the dystopian theme of the last one I reviewed, in Berlin, actually gave me nightmares. And I recall with trepidation the acute headaches from Whitney Biennials in the 1990s, when art was at the barricades of the culture wars.

By welcome contrast, the Long Island Biennial on view at the [Heckscher Museum](#) through December 4, 2016 is an amiable gathering of works by 53 artists chosen from 336 entries. At a time when artists elsewhere are furiously assailing issues such as xenophobia, the election, nuclear war and global warming, there is likely more rage expressed in the traffic along Northern Boulevard than on the walls inside, where the pleasures of the studio and the artists’ aesthetics are celebrated.

The emblem of this bonhomie could be [Jeffrey Allen Price’s](#) *BRICKOLAGE Diptych: Cornerstones of Artistic Process*. Two decades of accumulated brushes, paint tubes and containers compressed into a “brick” 2 feet long and 15 inches high, it perches on its pedestal in the first room, a benevolent monument to the physical pleasures of painting in Nassau and Suffolk.



“BRICKOLAGE Diptych: Cornerstones of Artistic Process” by Jeffrey Allen Price, 2015. 20+ years accumulation of used paintbrushes, dried paint and empty paint containers, 15 x 24 x 12 inches. © Jeffrey Allen Price. Courtesy The Heckscher Museum of Art.

Some of the good spirit of the event can be credited to Lisa Chalif, curator of the Heckscher, who set the neighborly tone. The jurors were [Lori Bookstein](#), a gallerist from New York, Professor Seung Lee of LIU’s [C.W. Post](#) campus, and Christina Mossaides Strassfield, director and chief curator at [Guild Hall Museum](#) in East Hampton. Their solid choices—not just of the artists but of the three top awards—lend a diplomatically purposeful sense of assurance.

The absolute highlight of the show, for this lover of painting, is [Ty Stroudsberg’s](#) big, radiant *Highbeams II*, expertly hung on its own wall in the final room where its Zorro-esque gestures and

pulsing palette did not have to contend with the crowd. With works in public collections including the Heckscher and Guild Hall, Stroudsburg is too established to be considered an emerging talent, but her honored presence is significant to other artists on the rise.



“Highbeams II” by Ty Stroudsburg, 2016. Oil on linen, 36 x 39 inches. © Ty Stroudsburg. Courtesy The Heckscher Museum of Art.

A jaunty energy imbued Greenport-based [Hector de Cordova](#)’s lattices of acrylic and jewel-like bright tones in *Carnaval*, another absolute charmer among the paintings in the show. With a rich texture of oils upon oils and saturated colors—especially a lush range of greens—[Mark Seidenfeld](#)’s heavily worked *Morning of the Magician* is a technical tour de force.



“Morning of the Magician” by Mark Seidenfeld, 2015. Oil on canvas. 30 x 40 inches. © Mark Seidenfeld. Courtesy The Heckscher Museum of Art.

One of the award winners is [Jeff Muhs](#), who opens Gorky-like windows in the bright blue opaque surface of his *Charting Totality* to reveal a welter of greys and whites below.



“Charting Totality” by Jeff Muhs, 2016. Oil on canvas, 36 x 42 inches. © Jeff Muhs. Courtesy The Heckscher Museum of Art.

Sculpture is one of the genuine strengths of the 2016 Biennial. I am a longtime admirer of the expressive bronzes of [Marianne Weil](#), and the small but dynamic work in the show is a wonderful introduction to her work for those who have not had the privilege. Combining cast glass, copper and bronze, elegantly mounted on a welded steel stand, *Between Wind and Water* works from all angles, including from below and above.

The jury gave one of the three awards to a delicate and admirably deceptive ceramic piece by [Monica Banks](#). From a distance, *Hymn*, looks almost too sweet: a cake with pastel tones on its sides on a slender plinth, with a wavy white icing on its top. Up close, the icing turns out to be writhing

human figures, a far cry from calm and harmless confection.



“Hymn” by Monica Banks, 2015. Glazed English porcelain, 10-1/16 x 5-3/4 x 5-1/2 inches. © Monica Banks. Courtesy The Heckscher Museum of Art.

On the artist’s web site I found other similar works from her “Confections” series, which subversively combine bitter and saccharine or, in her words, “the joys of domestic life, the cruelty of nature, the anguish of inequity, and the despair of loss.” The two-step irony of a come-hither dessert and its surprise topping pack a Socratic punch.

There are other ceramists of note, including [Sarah Jaffe Turnbull](#) and [Susan Kadish](#), and if the Biennial is a thermometer, then it is clear that kilns on Long Island are enjoying robust heat.

Having seen a few superb photography exhibitions on the East End lately, I was prepared for the impressive turnout of several artists whose work is quietly but firmly among the most technically accomplished. I was especially taken by a dreamy cyanotype on canvas, painted over in acrylic, by [Qin Han](#). Its title, *Where is Home*, offers a timeless message that I interpreted in Chinese terms, in part because the artist told me she had trained not only at Pratt Institute but also at the prestigious Hangzhou Academy of Art.



“Where is Home?” by Qin Han, 2015. Acrylic, cyanotype, and digital printing on canvas, 38 x 40 inches. © Qin Han. Courtesy The Heckscher Museum of Art.

The floating women in two panels from a five-panel work made me think of the female spirits of the clouds and waters in the Donguang cave paintings, as well as Tang dynasty poetry, so often written in exile that displacement becomes a dominant theme. Along with a number of today’s Chinese filmmakers, notably Jia Zhangke, Han is taking a cinematic approach to a massive emotional subject.

Among the other photographers who stand out in the show are [Margaret M. Casella](#), with a still life that makes coffee filters bloom, and [Gerry Giliberti](#), who has made Zabriskie Point in Death Valley the subject of an operatic essay in light and shadow.



“Zabriskie Point, Death Valley” by Gerry Giliberti, 2014. Archival pigment print. 14 x 21 inches. © Gerry Giliberti. Courtesy The Heckscher Museum of Art.

Another stand out was [Alex Ferrone](#) and her *Flight – Winter Aerial Observations Five*, 2014. Having written an essay on her behalf, I was familiar with Ferrone’s adroit way of estranging the landscape to the point of abstraction through aerial photography but was still surprised by her image of a pond iced over in winter, its cracks and bubbles as delicate as an etching.



“Flight – Winter Aerial Observations Five” by Alex Ferrone, 2014. Photograph, dye sublimation on aluminum, 28 x 42 inches. © Alex Ferrone. Courtesy The Heckscher Museum of Art.

An affirmation of the local arts scene only serves the artists well if it frames the work in its international as well as regional context. It is a relief to report that this Biennial not only avoids parochialism and the empty rhetoric of similar exhibitions, but makes its own legitimate claim as a serious showcase for universally appealing objects of beauty.

BASIC FACTS: “Long Island Biennial 2016” is on view September 3 through December 4, 2016 at the Heckscher Museum of Art, 2 Prime Avenue, Huntington, NY 11743. www.heckscher.org.

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