

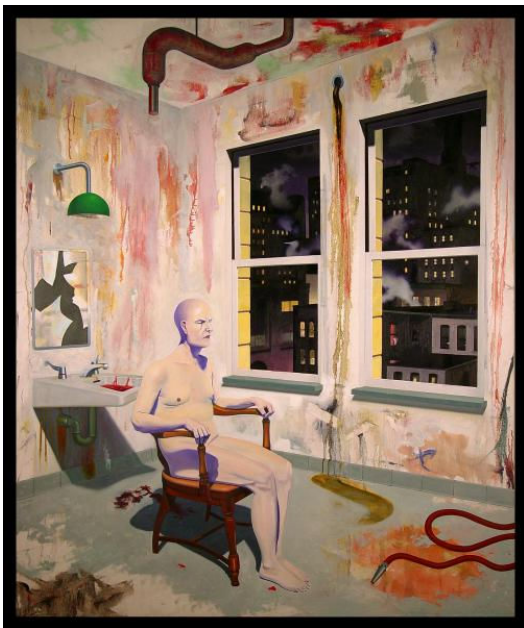
## 60 years of art awards at Silvermine

By Abby Luby

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For 60 years, the Silvermine Guild Arts Center in New Canaan has juried one of the most competitive art shows in the northeast United States. Known as "Art of the Northeast" (AoNE), the show annually receives more than 1,200 entries in all media from artists living in New England, New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Last week, invited juror Douglas Dreishpoon, chief curator at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, N.Y. selected 49 artists to be in the show that opened Friday with a public awards ceremony.



Heading up the list for Best in Show is a painting by Alex McFarlane of South Salem, N.Y., entitled "Life After Death." McFarlane, a Silvermine Guild member who is also on the art faculty, is an award winning sculptor originally based in New York City. "Life After Death" is part of an autobiographical series of paintings he started three years ago. The painting is lyrical, brushed with a delicate hand, but also dark and troubling. A naked man sits in a hard wood chair, his tightened face forcing his eyes shut so he can't see the deteriorating walls streaked in rusty pinks and burnt oranges. Outside, the nighttime cityscape with pinpoint lights and incinerator smoke evokes a cold sense of isolation. McFarlane said the work is autobiographical and has a dichotomous message. "This guy is

emotionally dead, but he is also alive. The first paintings in this series show a younger artist in the city with a full head of hair. The series will have a happy ending when I finish -- I'm not dead yet."

McFarlane said he was pleased but very surprised with the top AoNE award. "I thought it was such a long shot, but I understand they liked it quite a bit."



The Second Place Trustee Award went to Edith Borax-Morrison, a Silvermine Guild member, from Trumbull, for "Bemused," a work in pen and ink. An ethereal, meticulously drawn amoeba shape seems to float off the paper, buoyed by undulating yellow globules that give way to trailing, black- and-white tendrils. Borax-Morrison said the piece had an undersea feel.

"I'm thrilled and pleased to win an award and to be in the Silvermine show. I am primarily a painter who used to draw secretly and never showed the drawings to anyone."

About four years ago, Borax-Morrison showed her drawings to a friend, who urged her to show them publicly. "I call these drawings 'mind fibers' or 'pen weaved drawings' that are linear with woven lines. They are like weaving fairy tales."

Norwalk-based photographer Karin Hillmer won the Steven Madwed Memorial Award for her photograph "East to nowhere they discovered the lost island of MU." Hillmer is also a guild member who was thrilled to be in the show. "It's so meaningful to win an award like this, I have been drawing, painting and collaging throughout my life."

In her piece Hillmer uses a collage process where elements in the photograph are a sweet potato with small, leaved shoots jutting out into the air. An overlay of transparent, blue water transforms the potato into a small island that is directly in the path of a miniature 16th century ship, recasting a scene redolent of Gulliver's Travels with shifting size relationships.



"This piece is more about the fabled island of MU which was said to have been in the Pacific Ocean near Easter Island," explained Hillmer. "My images work with the concept of time and the piece has an element of magic. The ship is from the time of the Renaissance - a metaphor for when the world was being discovered."

"Stains and Puddle," a fun, installation piece made of plastic fencing by Joseph Fucigna, won the Mollie and Albert Jacobson Award in Sculpture. Fucigna is based in Weston and is a long time Silvermine member who has won three awards for the AoNE in the past.



The piece, which will be site specific at Silvermine, has organic mounds of black, piled garden netting swirled around and up to form "bee hives" with an opening at the top. The mounds have varying degrees of density from the impenetrable centers thinning out to wispy netting sheaths spilling out on the floor. Fucigna said he has been working with black netting for about four years.

"Using nondescript, industrial materials interests me. For this piece it's the idea of things melting and disappearing into space, or growing out of the walls or floor. I like to balance between formal qualities of matter and content. People can respond to the piece and the material gives them a hook," Fucigna said.

Overall, the competition saw submissions by many young artists, said Silvermine Gallery Director Jeffrey Mueller.

"To some degree I think it has to do a lot with the current economics and how it is affecting the art galleries. The AoNE is a great opportunity for younger artists."

Mueller said much of the work entered dealt with environmental issues and the use of recycled materials. "There is a lot of work that approaches traditional mediums in different ways -- ways that push the boundaries of what we consider a painting, for instance."

Mueller also commented on the selection style of juror Douglas Dreishpoon. "He was very much interested in how visitors would respond to where the art was placed in the galleries. He believed that the placement of the art tells a story."

Art of the Northeast at Silvermine runs until June 5 at the Silvermine Guild Arts Center, 1037 Silvermine Road, New Canaan CT 06840. For more information, call 966-9700, or visit [www.silvermineart.org](http://www.silvermineart.org).