

SPURN THE SCREW

Denied entry into the Newport Annual? 'So what,' say 20 artists who found a welcome reception at Blink Gallery

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Artists need a thick hide, or rather a carapace, if they want to survive rejection. Submitting work to juried shows can get depressing. Rookies are apt to take it more personally. Nothing quite pulverizes creativity to a halt like that inaugural 'Nope.'

"It's hard for people to reset, and not feel rejected, and be like, 'That's just one thing; it doesn't define my career as an artist,'" said Alexander "Sandy" Nesbitt.

So the photographer and Blink Gallery founder opened his venue to what Prince once dubbed the "strays of the world." Blink's second "Salon des Refusés," on view through Feb. 19, is an admirable collection of ostensible failures: Artworks that were rejected from this year's Newport Annual at the Newport Art Museum.

The Salon's first installment at Blink in 2016 echoed the Salons of 1863, when artists rejected from the official and stuffy Paris Salon rallied for their inclusion. Emperor Napoleon III obliged, deciding that the public could judge the losers' potential merit. Some of these rejects, like Édouard Manet's "The Luncheon on the Grass," have since become iconic — but Parisian audiences back then largely chuckled at these cast-off refusés.

In a rich coincidence, Nesbitt, his brother Rupert and mother Ilse were all granted entry into this



year's Annual. But Nesbitt is no stranger to rejection at the Annual, estimating his own success rate as "probably about 50/50." He rightly argues that the Annual is "very competitive no matter what's going on." The volume of submissions always dwarfs that of acceptances.

Nesbitt's educated guess is that accepted works achieve "a level of deliberate finish and display." That doesn't mean extravagance should be an artist's default option. "There are people who present things expensively, but that's not seriously," Nesbitt said. The latter involves an artist earnestly considering presentation as it relates to their specific artwork and

trying to make it as seamless (and engaging) as possible. Even if an artwork's aesthetic is intentionally "kinda crappy," Nesbitt believes an assured and thoughtful presentation is essential.

Or take the blasé advice of Jill Brody, a photographer and one of this year's refusés, who said via text: "It's always a crapshoot, and I never take personally whether I get accepted or rejected." She too has met both victory and

defeat in the Annual over the years; in 2010 she placed first in photography.

Her rejected photo, "I am full of life now, compact" hovers over a mass of plant growth, mostly tan

"Being rejected as a portrait artist is never a surprise."

— PAMELA HICKS
Salon des Refusés exhibitor



^ "It's hard for people to reset, and not feel rejected," says Alexander 'Sandy' Nesbitt who offers artists rejected by the Newport Annual a second chance to put their work on public display at his Blink Gallery. Nesbitt says his own record of getting into the Newport Annual is about 50/50. For the record, he did get in again this year. PHOTO BY DAVE HANSEN

<<< **Sold!** Even Dan McManus, a former Newport Annual Best in Show winner, didn't get in this year. His 44 in. x 44 in. photograph, 'askew,' found the ultimate acceptance with a buyer on opening night at Blink Gallery.

and brown with intervening spots of clover. Lacking drama, narrative or action, it might seem a pointless image to some, but I'm very partial to pictures sans point. They resist photography's epidemic tendency toward rote and obvious beauty, instead encouraging a more nuanced appreciation of one's surroundings. It's a joy to tangle and untangle the lines and forms in Brody's meditative and charmingly titled piece.

Sylvia Hampton's "Summer Night in the Cornfield" belongs to the same genre of ambient imagery. There's a dark thrill in the sliver of blue light that dances across green husks. This lighting elevates the terrestrial scenery to alien proportions. Enveloping shadows further leave us in the dark, teetering between horror and magic — two pleasures mostly absent from this year's Annual.

Pamela Hicks' oil portrait of local dancer Kristen Minsky, "Unapologetic," was in another realm entirely. Astonishingly, its clunky, soft gold frame somehow worked, amplifying the painting's creamy palette and dancer's confident smirk. The result is mildly sultry, oddly satisfying in its straightforwardness.

"Being rejected as a portrait artist is never a surprise," Hicks said. "It has been out of fashion for a long

time." She moved to Rhode Island two years ago and has attempted entering the Annual twice, adding: "The awkward part in Newport is having to physically take your work. It's a better experience for the juror and a lot of effort for artists."

Meanwhile Nesbitt is focused on an experience amiable to both artist and gallerist. The Salon is "completely not a utilitarian thing," rather it's "strange" and "euphoric," he said. It distracts him from the pressures of product and sales: "That's not really why anybody's in the door ... The reason we're looking at artwork is creativity and exuberance and self-expression."


All three reasons appeared in this year's refusés, which are often subtle, adventurous and worth seeing. At least one viewer agreed: The gallery sold "askew," Daniel McManus' large photograph of a vintage toy, on opening night.

SALON DES REFUSÉS

Through Feb. 19

Blink Gallery, 478 Thames St., Newport

Open Sat. & Sun., 12-5 p.m.

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blinkgalleryusa.com