

# Still Life & Floral

BY ANI KODJABASHEVA



## FIRST PLACE

### Jian Wu

One Saturday morning, Jian Wu (jwstudio.net), of Union City, Calif., was lounging on the sofa with his wife when he noticed the perfect scene on a table nearby. His wife had

arranged fresh-cut roses from the garden in a glass vase beside a bowl of apples and oranges. Gorgeous light was streaming in through the window. Captivated by the light and color, Wu made a few quick sketches and took photos. *Glowing*, which took six hours to complete, is a celebration of everyday life.

Still Life & Floral Category Juror Kathy Hildebrandt finds the painting's title to be a good fit. "It has light,

ABOVE  
**Glowing** (18x24)  
by Jian Wu

OPPOSITE  
**This Closet Shows  
No Vacancy** (29x21)  
by William-Daniel  
Cadieux

contrast, color, composition and masterful painting technique," she says.

Pointing out the newspaper in shadow in the right corner, Wu explains: "It's actually an electricity bill. It's the kind of clutter you leave on the table and don't notice until the weekend, but beautifully rendered, I think, OK, this is life," Wu says.

Apart from this small joke, Wu's *Glowing* is in a rhapsodic key. As the title suggests, the subject is the light. (See his award-winner, *Dancing Light*, on page 44.) "To me, the key is to have a strong point of focus that draws viewers' attention—an area where light is the music and colors are the dancers," he says.

Wu's goal in painting from life is to capture the emotion of a fleeting moment. To do that effectively, he relies on a compositional method he has developed in the past year, which involves modulating color, lighting and brushstrokes. "My main focus in *Glowing* is the arrangement of flowers in the glass jar," he says. "The fruit plate is secondary." That's why the flowers are fully lit and painted in warm colors with tighter brushstrokes, while most of the fruit is in shadow. "I painted the shadowed fruit loosely using cool colors and soft edge rendering," he says. "For the orange under the bright light, I spent more time rendering the details. Overall, I was looking for color contrast, lighting contrast, and a contrast of tight and loose painting."

The "glowing" effect is created by softening the boundaries between objects and between the foreground and background. "I blurred the light around the flowers to create an airy atmosphere," says Wu. "I used light purple and light blue around the yellowish flowers to render a soft color transition. Lighting unification and color harmony are my objectives."

## SECOND PLACE

### William-Daniel Cadieux

In *This Closet Shows No Vacancy*, the artist William-Daniel Cadieux



(alainwilliampastel.com), of Québec, Canada, lets viewers come close to the intimate space of his closet, almost near enough, it seems, to touch the fabrics jutting out of the picture plane. The brilliant lighting and exquisite detail make it seem as if we're within reach of the plaid, lobster-printed and striped shirts. "The challenge with this piece," says Cadieux, "was to achieve the 'feel' of different types of fabrics and textures—rigid or soft, worn, cotton, wool—and proper rendering of the patterns."

The work was painstaking. "This piece is the first one that I put nearly 200 hours into making," says Cadieux. The artist first took photos inside his closet under the bright neon overhead light. He then made a freehand sketch, which he transferred onto

pastel paper. The heavy lines allow for an accurate transfer.

The unique concept and hard work paid off. "This is a great concept that I haven't seen before," Hildebrandt says. "The textures, color and details, combined with a unique composition and subject matter, make for a painting that stands out."

The painting's realistic style encourages us look at everyday objects with a renewed clarity. It leads the viewer to wonder if this is a painting about loss, made evident by the obtrusive presence of the clothes left behind. "I'm drawn to clothing," says Cadieux, "and when I was younger, I was compulsive about them. I was buying clothes, gaining weight, losing it, gaining once more and keeping



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT  
**The Gift Box** (13½x13½)  
 by Marie Tippetts

**3 Generations** (29x20½)  
 by Laurel B. Friedmann

**Glorious Day** (14x18)  
 by Lyn Diefenbach

I'll fall in love with a particular object," Tippetts says. "I may not know why it strikes me so much, but I'll start with that."

Arranging the still life is an integral part of the process, and Tippetts acts as a set designer as well as a painter. She has a spot in her home, in front of a pair of French doors, where she likes to experiment. "The shades are drawn in the beginning," she says, "while I concentrate on composition and story arrangement. I can never predict what the light will do when I raise the shades, but I'm always hopeful for that 'magic'—the warm

glow, the beautiful long shadows, the gorgeous colors in the shaded areas." Tippetts continues to rearrange the objects until the setup and the light "work together, in harmony, to give me the green light to proceed."

For *The Gift Box*, Tippetts started from a bird's-eye view, which allowed her to reveal all the details of the intricately decorated cups. She decided to use the box and lid as a framing device; the angularity complemented "the soft, round femininity of the cups," she says. The tissue paper acts as a transition between the two.

The simple and striking, perfectly balanced composition ensures that these heirlooms will be passed down to the next generation.

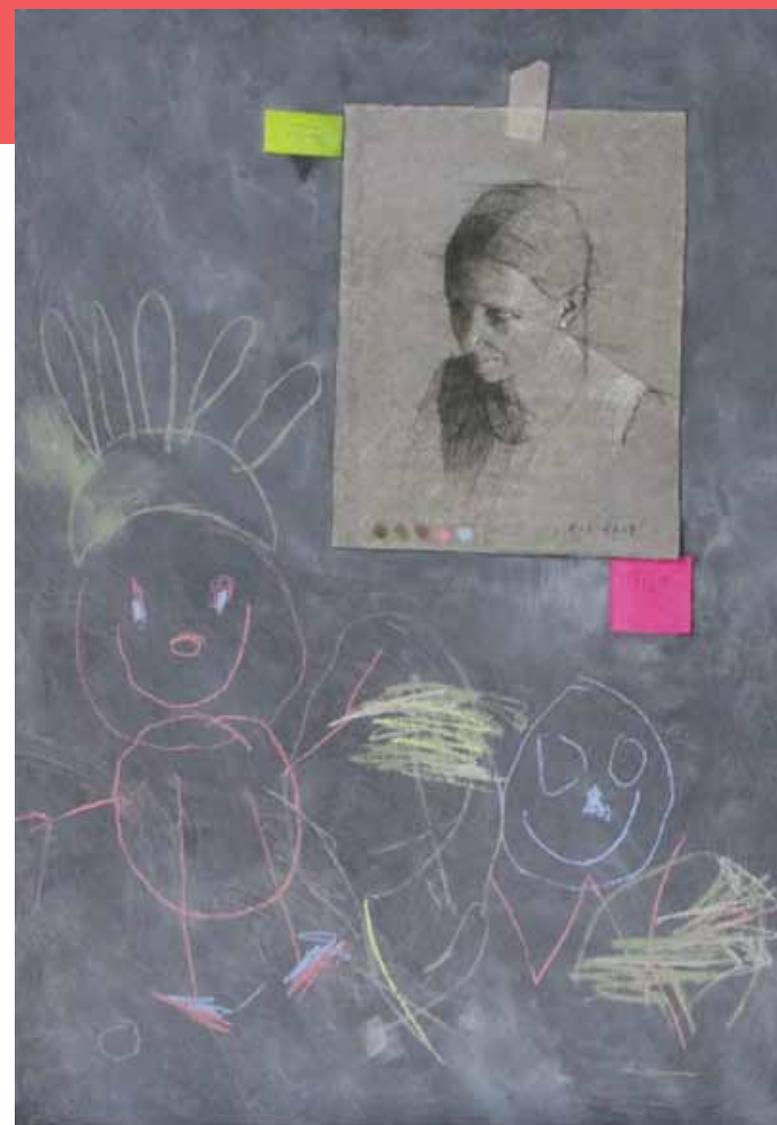
#### FOURTH PLACE

##### Laurel B. Friedmann

"This painting reflects my fascination with the figure," says Old Saybrook, Conn., artist Laurel B. Friedmann of her pastel, *3 Generations*, which is a triple portrait inside a still life. The model for the taped drawing is the artist's daughter, and the chalk drawings were done by her grandchildren.

Hildebrandt caught on to the meaningful story behind the painting. "What may look simple was likely difficult to paint, and the subject clearly has meaning to the artist."

Friedmann's painting is a reflection of the way we deem certain kinds of art more worthy. "I began to think about



the relative value we afford adult art in comparison to children's art—to trained artists versus self-taught ones," she says.

She first drew a portrait of her daughter from a photo. She then built a mock-up with the chalkboard, tape, drawing paper and Post-it Notes, and set it under her desired lighting.

Friedmann used Gatorfoam as a support and applied pumice mixed into acrylic "to provide the textured look of a washed and dried chalkboard," she says. She made an underpainting for the non-chalkboard areas with acrylic and applied more pumice before transferring the line drawing.

The hardest parts were the chalk portraits, where Friedmann's precision seemed at odds with the subject and style. "I was more comfortable using my life drawing skills and training," she says, "than emulating the directness of the hand of a child."

#### FIFTH PLACE

##### Lyn Diefenbach

"Flowers are amazing in that they have their own light," says Lyn Diefenbach (ldief.com), of Mulambin, Australia, of her floral subject in *Glorious Day*, "whether they're in bright sunlight or in deep shadow." In the painting, pink blossoms are seen against a stark, bright sky, their edges glowing. The backlighting gives them a softness and a three-dimensional quality. "You can feel the warmth of the sun and the texture of the petals," says Hildebrandt.

For Diefenbach, pastel was the perfect medium to capture this phenomenon, as it delivers "intense pigment in a sculptural way." Perhaps the blossoms appear so full-bodied because of the artist's practice of thinking about how the flowers feel to the touch while she paints them. "I painted the imagined sensation of touching their surfaces," she says.

Diefenbach is interested in exploring the small-scale but remarkable phenomena present around us. "We seem to spend so much of our time," she says, "passing by the most exquisite discoveries." **PJ**

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