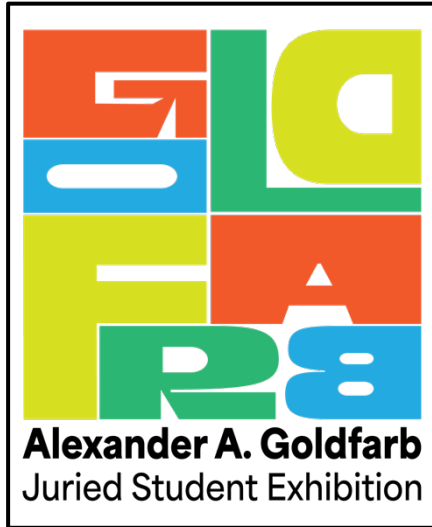


Stories We Tell—A Reflection on Jurying the 2024 Alexander A. Goldfarb Exhibit



Art tells the story of the world around us. Art makes statements. Art cultivates space for dialogue and understanding. Art is a tool for connection. I truly believe this. When I see art that speaks loudly by theme, aesthetic, or message, I get excited. There are many pieces in this year's Goldfarb exhibit that did this for me, making it very difficult to select only two standouts. Some recurring themes that I noticed include: "Sense of Identity", "Desire to Belong", "Being Heard or Seen", "Overcoming Adversity", and "Cultural Narratives". There is some great storytelling in these works. I can tell that there was a great deal of thought and effort put into the execution of the work. I selected these pieces because I felt as much as I saw. Although I didn't get a good sense of scale for some of these pieces, as the jurying process was virtual, I went into this understanding that the impact

of the work is not limited to size and medium. For me, the value as an observer and admirer of the art lies in its intention and message.

Crossroads of Identity presents the artist's Vietnamese American identity as an internal conflict in which they confront ancestral struggle while navigating their path to purpose. Although I do not identify with the pain of war, I do understand the desire to be seen, the fight to be heard, and I share a desire for freedom as I also seek purpose in my work. *Crossroads of Identity* is an image that stands out visually, but more importantly the subdued color palette evokes strong emotion. A residual fight continues although the war has long passed. The thickness of the artist's marks gives a sense of heaviness, long-felt inherited heaviness, as described in their statement. The composition took me on a journey. They yearn to be seen and heard. They have not yet been fully embraced by this multifaceted identity of Vietnamese American. In a place that is supposed to welcome those "yearning to be free", as Lady Liberty tells us, we haven't fully grasped the complexities of freedom. There is work to do.

One Hundred Thousand Pounds of Morning Dew resonated with me on a personal level. I've been there before. I've felt the vulnerability of struggle. I've been hungry. The fragility of the foil point, felt like an interpretation of what it feels like to try to protect the little you have in that moment while maintaining your dignity. It was described as a "legitimation tactic", which I interpreted as accepting this is where they were in the moment and these were the circumstances, but it changed because there was some fight still in them. As artists, many of us have times when we experience lack or struggle. It does not have to last. We must use that determination to survive as fuel to push ourselves further. Remember what it feels like. Acknowledge this part of your story but be strategic in how you write the chapters that follow.

The submissions for this show all had something to say. I'm intrigued by how artists tell stories. I see the work as conversation. Sometimes the discussion goes beyond what is depicted, and I welcome that opportunity. The purpose of art is to express and for viewers to feel something from that expression. I'm impressed by these artists' ability to do this. The abovementioned works spoke to me in a unique way, but my choices were not easy. I look forward to experiencing these works in person.

- Andre Rochester, Fine Artist, Art Curator - UConn Health, Manager of Arts Programming - The 224 EcoSpace, Arts Advocate