

Juror's statement for Visual Arts Fellowship 2019:

There is a quotation that I keep on my office bulletin board, by a curator whom I admire, Nicholas Baume. It reads, "Simplicity in art is rarely achieved without a struggle." It reminds me daily of the hard-won triumphs of artists, and that each art object is the product of an artist's investment of time, talent and technique. It is an act of courage to speak one's deepest thoughts and convictions through making, to take that risk to create and be heard.

I thought of this quotation when I saw Jim Jacobs' sculptures. He makes the seamless transition of wood from its natural form to its sculpted counterpart appear effortless. Yet one recognizes simply by seeing Jacobs' sculptures, the years of creative fortitude and accumulated knowledge about wood and sculptural methods that coalesced to make that transition so...simple.

Simple they are not, however. Jacobs' sculptures disrupt. At first, there is a certain whimsy and wonder to the works. Is that toppled chair metamorphosing into a tree? Or, how is it possible for wood to transmute into hair? Slowly, the disjuncture inherent in the object unsettles our sense of the "natural" order of things. Jacobs calls these transitions "grafting," a decidedly scientific term that reveals an uncanny, even grotesque, insinuation of the works. How did such an anomaly as this object come to be? The answer, the artist tells us through his sculptures, is that modern society has had an unnatural impact on the natural environment.

Shane Deeter has mastered a different natural material, handled with equal finesse: leather. A saddlemaker, Deeter continues a traditional art form steeped in that iconic figure of the American West—the cowboy. His beautifully tooled-leather details embellish complex constructions that endure. But equally, one can appreciate his unembellished saddles for their deceptive simplicity.

Simple they are not, however. Deeter's saddles breathe. On one saddle, Deeter fluidly sculpted a profusion of 50 blooming flowers, one for each state flower. As a composition, the form is dense with imagery and vitality. Colored thread stitched in well-conceived patterns into other saddles is another form of mark-making Deeter uses. He approaches the saddle as a composition, looking to nature for inspiration, but also to other fields such as pinstriping and graphic arts.

Too often traditional arts are framed around notions of loss and revival. Artists such as Deeter contradict the idea that saddlery is at risk of extinction and is in need of revival. As long as there are horses, there will be saddles—and those who strive to make saddles that are the highest caliber of craftsmanship and artistry.

I was guided in my selection of Jim Jacobs and Shane Deeter by criteria one would expect in any juried selection: depth of vision over time, exceptional craftsmanship, a well-articulated conceptual framework, the potential of shaping one's field for future generations of artists. At the same time, I am always compelled to recognize

and affirm that human creativity appears in diverse forms, whether folk or traditional arts, crafts, art, design or any other category one might imagine. These diverse expressions of an inner need to create are what I sought to convey with this year's fellowships. I easily could have—and wish I could have—selected a dozen more.