

Juror's Statement

Catharine Clark, February 2017

It is important that artists are not outside the equation, we don't stand on the sidelines. Artists are part of the story of a response, we cannot stand aside and let others make the response.

Anish Kapoor, in: "Ai Weiwei and Anish Kapoor lead London walk of compassion for refugees,"
"Mark Brown, The Guardian, Sep 17, 2015

Joy is an act of resistance.

Why would a black woman need a fish to love? Why did she need a flash of red, living, in the corner of her eye? As if she could love nothing up close, but had to step away from it, come back to drop a few seeds & let it grab on to her, as if it caught her on some hook that couldn't hurt. Why did she need a fish, a red thorn or, among the thorns, that flower? What does her love have to do with five hundred years of sorrow, then joy coming up like a small breath, a bubble? What does it have to do with the graveyards of the Atlantic in her mother's heart?

From Toi Derricotte, *The Telly Cycle*, 2008

Artists have a particular capacity to reflect on history, events transpiring and unfolding around them, and anticipate the future. They can convey what Derricotte and Neel are expressing: they can create joy through their work as an act of resistance. The ideas in their art can serve as the proverbial *canary in the coal mine*, forewarning, showing and interpreting for us what we might otherwise see less clearly or not at all. I believe in the capacity of art to transform opinions, emotions, experiences, politics and lives, and to assist us in our understanding of and empathy for each other.

I think about the role of art the way President Obama thinks about literature. Art allows us to see through the eyes of another person. In a conversation with the writer Marilynne Robinson that was sprinted in the *New York Review of Books* (November 19, 2015), President Obama speaks of being concerned about people not reading novels any longer and how that might impact our ability to find common ground with another person. He asks Ms. Robinson: Are you somebody who worries about people not reading novels anymore? And do you think that has an impact on the culture? When I think about how I understand my role as citizen, setting aside being president, and the most important set of understandings that I bring to that position of citizen, the most important stuff I've learned I think I've learned from novels. It has to do with empathy. It has to do with being comfortable with the notion that the world is complicated and full of grays, but there's still truth there to be found, and that you have to strive for that and work for that. And the notion that it's possible to connect with some[one] else even though they're very different from you.

The artists whose works were selected for this exhibit are empathic and courageous. Making work and sharing it with the public is a process that requires vulnerability and bravery. I want to encourage the artists--those whose works were selected, and those whose weren't--to continue to fight to make their work, to speak their truth, to express nuance, to show the gamut of emotions that we experience as humans, and to get the exposure necessary to have as wide a purview for their ideas as is possible. In an era where our freedom of expression is threatened and even facts are debated as if they were opinions, artists serve a special role in our democracy as truth tellers and their work provides a forum to express the concerns of the under-represented and for those without a voice or a platform. Like Ai Weiwei and Anish Kapoor say in an article by Mark Brown titled *Ai Weiwei and Anish Kapoor lead London walk of compassion for refugees*, published in *The Guardian* (September 17, 2015), and a quote from which I opened this statement: "Artists are part of the story of a response, we cannot stand aside and let others make the response." I believe that at this moment, the artist's role as activist is critical in articulating veracity, interpreting the world, encouraging compassion, and depicting complexity.

In the adjudication process for this exhibition, I was encouraged by what I saw as the ambition of many of the works submitted. Challenging scale, unusual materials, creative response, and strong perspective were evident in much of the work. I applaud those who especially took risks in these areas.

We often associate the word creative with fields like writing, art making, architecture, or with activities like solving puzzles or word games. Any procedure that involves finding original answers and novel approaches instead of established solutions is a creative process. Whether as an artist you use your skills and education to pursue a career in the arts or in another field, your art making experience and education will help you solve problems better and innovate—skills that are highly prized by most employers in this era.

Art has many roles and will serve you and your community in many ways. For me among its highest and best callings is that art can give hope, it can be a tool in fighting injustice, and it can change minds and lives. Because art-making is critical in educating and training our brains to problem solve, we must fight for the freedom and resources for artists to make their work, which in turn will help us to find the humanity in one another, bridge community differences, innovate, and create places of understanding and healing. We are depending on art to help get us through these deeply divided times. Thank you for contributing to bringing important concerns to light through your thoughtful works.