

LETTER to the editor

A Response to Mark Pascale's Commentary on Juried Shows "Why Bother?" Graphic Impressions, Winter-Spring, 2001

by Karen Kunc

Why Does She Bother?

Mark brought up all the valid and commonly understood criticisms of juried shows: that it is just a "game", that the vast variety of works fit into predictable categories, that participating is just an "anonymous affair", and the minute spent with the one piece by so many artists can seem meaningless. Let me add the organizers hassle and logistics of organization, reliance on volunteers, and the inevitable bad review by the local art critic (which killed off our local opportunities). Yet I feel that it is too bad that the juried shows are typically perceived in such a bad light.

Perhaps I have taken the remarks from my old friend to heart, and see a looming question directed at those of us with experience and established reputations who regularly participate in juried shows - "Why does she bother? - surely she has other venues, and more important shows to do?" Or, is she just padding her resume for annual merit review at the University, where literally, numbers do count.

I want to respond because for me the juried shows have had significant impact in building my career, in making contacts, in achieving recognition for my work - and my prints has become recognizable to a vast number of you out there precisely because of the juried show. I can tell you of the countless times over the years that someone approaches me to tell me of seeing my work in some place, somewhere, or in some documentation of a show. These comments have mapped the wide exposure of my work and prove how meaningful it was that my work was there. Most of my gallery connections came from dealers who saw my work in a juried venue or catalogue - they were doing their homework of looking for new artists at the grassroots. Since I have served as a juror for a number of shows or fellowship reviews, I also have found artists new to me whose work I continue to follow - and I have subsequently found you among our membership, and so have established important friendships and mutual respect. I possess a great capacity for seeing a lot of work and reading the images and ideas, even in the overwhelming scene of the big juried show - perhaps this is the compensatory pleasure of looking at prints in real life or in documentation, as there is so dreadfully little to see in the way of prints in any art publication. Here are the reasons why I bother:

The Juror: the shows I do depend on the juror - one who understand prints, a respected curator, fellow printmaker. This is a way for me to have them see my work. Far from isolating me through this practice, I can do this from anywhere, and my work is seen by some of the best people in the field, who most

likely will not. be stopping in for a studio visit here, even if they are out searching around the country.

The Dialogue: from my continuous activity over many years, a wide range of my work has been exposed, and those interested have followed my development. I hear feedback all the time about my work, as I make sure that the work I send out is varied, showing different phases and interests, sent out and tested "in the water". I don't want to find a successful formula for the kind of work that will be accepted, just as I would not want a formula in my creative life.

The Context: I want my work seen in the context of other work. I don't want to be isolated from the newcomers, nor from the world of printmakers. I want to be evaluated as everyone else by a juror who has a vision or perspective to test. And I can take rejection, as I certainly do not get into every show. Those that follow my work know of my depth through all of these kind of venues over many years, which is, unfortunately, rather removed from their possibility to learn of my life's work by going to a major institution, whose collecting of prints in depth is largely restricted to those of historical figures or blue chip crossover artists, whose value is a construction by vested interests.

Balance: I personally think it is important and valuable to exhibit one's work in a wide range of venues, such as educational institutions, commercial galleries, traveling invitationals, huge international biennials, and juried shows. I look for this balance when I am asked to evaluate others, and when I look at artists for the projects I curate, and I strive to create that balance in my own resume, because I know of the different efforts and expectations required for such different opportunities, and the resulting benefits to the viewers and to myself.

My Personal Standard: the practical things, such as whether I can made the deadline, the ease of presentation, what new work I have that I want to test, the juror, the location of the exhibition, and the history of the organization. If these are all intriguing to me, and offer something new for my experience and exposure, then I enjoy the pursuit and the sense of competition. In that, it is a game, and perhaps only for me. But beyond that I have learned of the impact of my work out there in so many ways with important results over the years that have really added up.

I agree and was gratified to read Mark's conclusion in defense of the juried show - the evidence that a community is educated and energized by the pleasure of being with so many prints in real life for a time. I believe that those of us who continue to participate contribute to the quality of this endeavor, which is the spirit of my interest and support.

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