

ORGANIZER'S STATEMENT

My purpose in developing and staging this show is decidedly utopian and perhaps radically egalitarian. It is a utopian project that art critic Michael Fallon sees as doomed to failure – at least in the long run. It stems from many conversations with friends and family, artists and non-artists about what an award like the MCAD/Jerome Foundation Fellowship for Emerging Artists means to an individual artist and how it affects the art community as a whole. As naive as it may sound, I do, in fact, hope this exhibition can in some small way remove some of the negative competition and create a little more cohesion and cooperation in the arts community of Minnesota.

In bringing together the work of applicants for the Fellowship, I don't seek to recreate the experience of the juror for the viewer. It is not my intent for the work to be comparatively evaluated, though I know that this is inevitable and that viewers will choose their own set of rightful winners. My intent is to show the breadth of work being created under the banner of emerging artists. Even in this small sample (only 42 artists out of 281 agreed to participate), one sees an overwhelming array of media and genres, artists who are academy trained and those who are self taught, artists working at the cutting edge and those honoring art historical tradition. I was asked by an artist who chose not to participate what the rationale was for this exhibition except that all these artists would be "losers." This person said that there would be no thematic cohesion, nothing to link these artists other than their failure. I think that what links the work is that all these artists have identified as "emerging" – a contentious term to be sure – and that by bringing their work together we can see the vibrancy and diversity of the visual art community that we in Minnesota love to talk about. Through my interactions with these artists I have come to feel that they are also linked by their determination, sense of humor, and fearlessness. Throughout this catalog you will find this reflected in their own comments on the grant process and reasons for participating in this exhibition.

In the end, I feel that the show has become a mirror for the viewers. In it they see the reflection of whichever aspect of the grant process seems most troublesome to them. My hope is that through this show, and this process of identifying what is troublesome, we can rethink our relationship to the grants process and the institutions that administer them. And, though highly unlikely, perhaps it can begin a process of change.

-Monica Sheets

Usually there are a number of artists equally well qualified for each grant opportunity. Thus picking the grant recipients will be determined, to a degree, by the sensibilities of juror(s) and perhaps, to a degree, simply by chance. - Jane Powers

Participation in a highly regarded venue is always a great opportunity, so I am happy to be a part of this event. I use photography in a very non-traditional way and enjoy exposing it to the public. - Polly Norman

I am very inspired by Monica Sheets' idea for this exhibition and her vision to empower emerging artists and wanted to be part of this special event. Participation in this exhibition has significantly furthered my own work in terms of production as well as representation - thanks again, Monica! - Virajita Singh

Understandably, there is not enough money floating around for every deserving artist to get a significant amount. I think this show is a good way to give recognition to artists whose work is excellent, yet somehow don't manage to make the cut. - Jeremy Szopinski

When I participate in the grant process, I look at it as an opportunity to be involved in the arts community, and if I am chosen for a grant, it's icing on the cake to explore uncharted waters. - Julia Leigh

This show is unusual. It started out as a competitive win/lose application, and Monica neutralized that by somehow getting a hold of us losers, then offering us some of her spotlight. I am in the show because I want to show my work, even though I feel like it's just an honorable mention. - Anastasia Ward

Any collection of art is a collection of ideas. I am interested in the phenomenon of thinking on a level where collective images are presented as evidence of connections between heart and mind, especially when the venue itself is creative. - Steven Nesheim

I appreciate the opportunity to show my art work in a different and important venue of the Jerome umbrella and the Minneapolis College of Art and Design. My hope is that with the new exposure I can find someone with an appreciation of my work. - Mary Thoreson Strother

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MINNESOTA EMERGING ARTISTS EXHIBITION
OCT. 19 - NOV. 25, 2007
MCAD Gallery 2500 Stevens Avenue, Minneapolis, MN 55404

Organized by Monica Sheets in conjunction with the MCAD/Jerome Foundation Fellowships application process and exhibition. For questions or more information, please call 612.781.0503

MINNESOTA EMERGING ARTISTS



EXHIBITION

No one knows exactly how one artist is chosen from a pool of similar artistic competence but this imperfect (and emotional) way is the only way we have to award a limited amount of grant money. The idea to show a selection of artists not chosen is (admirable) thought provoking and inspiring and shows how artists can work together to advance the cause of art. - Margaret L. Holmes

The logistics of mounting an exhibition far from one's studio can be daunting. Monica Sheets has made the process easy by creating this virtual exhibition. - Paula J. Swenson

Minnesota is a great place to live if you are an artist - grant opportunities are plentiful. However, just as plentiful is the number of artists who live here and apply for such opportunities, making the process for receiving one of those grants even more competitive. - George Byron Griffiths

Being given the opportunity to apply for the Jerome Fellowship was an honor and a privilege. Learning about Monica Sheets' parallel show was a very pleasant surprise - and participation has been a joy. - Mary Klein

Whenever an artist applies for a grant, they open not only their artistic endeavors, but also their self worth as an artist, to intense scrutiny and subjective judgment. The parallel show of emerging artists is a positive way to recognize and reaffirm the work of these artists who are striving toward excellence in their work. - Ann E. Judkins

I participated in this exhibition because I thought it was a good way to showcase the talented artists that get overlooked by the grant process year after year. - Shawn McNulty

The primary reason for my participation is the tremendous opportunity for more exposure. As an "emerging artist" these venues are difficult to be a part of, as the whole grant process appears to be saved for a small group of politically savvy "mid-career artists." - Jennifer Kuhr

I am participating in this project due to the compassion and politics of Monica Sheets who understands the complex, fickle world of establishing oneself as an artist. My participation is part of my relentless effort to get my art out in the world. - Carolyn G. Halliday

The grant process eludes most artists. Most spend hours if not days collecting data, writing statements, and finding the right images to use. In one sentence their efforts evaporate with little knowledge of the process. Most peers question the bias of the panelists and question how factors such as sleep, food, and interaction (peer pressure) play a role. As one of the opportunities available to artists, most leave the process wondering much but above all, whether their work had merit and if not why? While impractical, most artists would enjoy some element of feedback to the grant process, as it stands now too many questions are left unanswered. - Susan Boecher

ON ARTISTIC COMPETITION

by Michael Fallon

ARTISTS AND ART LOVERS OFTEN CREDIT COLLABORATION as a prime driver of creative expression. But if one examined the actual record of artistic accomplishment, one would quickly find that togetherness and cooperation aren't a very common spur to artistic efforts. Rather, artists often are driven in their creativity by baser impulses like jealousy, vindictiveness, competitiveness, even, occasionally, pure hatred.

Call it "creative differences" if you will, but head-to-head battles abound in art history. Vincent Van Gogh brandished a razor at Paul Gauguin in the south of France. Pablo Picasso, perhaps weighed down by his rather healthy ego, never got along with pretty much anyone. Paul Cezanne denounced his childhood friendship with Emile Zola, after the author published a novel loosely based on Cezanne's life. Jackson Pollock broke with his teacher and mentor Thomas Hart Benton, saying the elder artist's teachings at best merely gave him something to rebel against. And James Turrell broke from his friend Robert Irwin, shrugging off several intriguing months of joint experiments on sensory deprivation.

One of my favorite artists, the celebrated French classicist Jacques-Louis David, could be the patron saint of artistic competition. Not only did he fight with nearly every artist of his time—including several former students, whom he deemed ungrateful to their former master—but he pretty much thrived on contention and competition, fostering it in his atelier among his students by positioning them like chess pieces placed at varying proximity to him. The artistic spirit of many a student of David was broken after jockeying to be shown at the annual Paris Salon (as a student of David) or to be that year's recipient of the Prix de Rome. I often wonder how many young artists throughout history have given up on art after having to deal with all the bitter competition found in ateliers or classrooms like David's.

THOUGH TIMES HAVE CHANGED, THE HONEST ARTIST KNOWS that competitiveness and contention, jealousy and backbiting abound even now in the art world. Artists feel it when an artist "friend" receives a grant award that they themselves applied for, when fellow artists organize a show or other opportunity but don't include them, or when word comes back around about some artist friend's sniping about their work.

This touchiness among artists is understandable. Art is a tough thing to pull off in the world we have made for ourselves, overrun as it is with pointless distractions and ambivalent as it is about beauty created by hand. The artist's practice is often thankless and tense. Grants, exhibition opportunities, sales and other patronage are hard for any artist to procure, especially when so many fellows are scrambling to dip into the small pool of support. The inevitable rejection faced day after day by the striving artist is an almost certain recipe for existential crisis, if not a spur eventually to give up art.

From my vantage point as a professional observer of, and commenter on, the local art scene in Minnesota, I have had a microcosmic view of the local artistic foot-race. I've seen all manner of home-grown artists scramble to position themselves in proximity to certain trends and fashions and in opposition to others—if only to get a firm toehold on

success. I've seen that the order of the day among local artists is, above all else: You're either in my camp, or you're an enemy. Given the various competitive factors affecting the arts, it's inevitable that a dog-eat-dog Balkanization becomes the artistic order of the day.

As a result of my attempts to call this race (and position the racers in relation to the National Art Derby), I've received all manner of reaction from artists. I've been called "negative" and "bitter" (and worse) at times for words I've written about artists' works I deemed not up to speed, and I've also—for the very same review—been taken to task by an artist for being too positive about his rivals. Furthermore, I've known artists locally who were friends with each other twenty-five years ago, who now could not stand to be in the same room—because they practiced different brands of arts or followed different art philosophies or some other obscure reason. I've seen gallerians too come along and make a good try at the game—courting artists with talk of bringing their work to their fabulous new space—only to grow bitter from dealing with artist demand and run off into the night issuing curses and blame at everyone who contributed to the gallery's failure.

NONE OF THESE STRUGGLES ARE UNIQUE TO MINNESOTA; they are conditions inherent in the stressful pursuit of art across the country. Still, based on what I know of other places I can say there is one particular point of artistic contention that makes this place somewhat unique. This is the air of contention and jealousy that surrounds competition for the direct artist grants given each year by three major charitable foundations in this state—the Bush Foundation, the Jerome Foundation, and the McKnight Foundation.

This money, of course, is generous and very unique in this country, especially for an art market of our middling size. However, the opportunity that this money and exposure gives to individual artists in the end is somewhat more toxic and jealousy-inducing than anything else.

Every artist who has been turned down for one of these grants—and a great many fantastic local artists have never won a single one of them—thinks pretty much the same bitter thought when rejected: *My art is better than, or at least as good as, what was granted, so why didn't I win?* And this is true whether or not the artists are aware that the jurying process for the grants is very flawed, with very human jurors who will often appreciate some art more than other for capricious reasons. Even more disturbing than the universal sour grapes among the non-granted, nearly every artist I

My reason for participating in this parallel show is, it gives the art viewer/audience an important insight into the vast variety of emerging artists making Minnesota their home base to work and live. - David Wyrick

I think this is a great idea to get the work of emerging artists out there. I'm not from Minneapolis originally, and I'm impressed by the support emerging and mid-career artists receive. - Erika Ritzel

As the grant process narrows to a few works chosen by a select panel with their own select interests, it excludes much fine work that does not fit into that framework. I chose to participate in this exhibition because I wanted to support a project that allows viewers, including myself, to see the broad range of talent and work that was submitted for grant consideration. - Marilyn Erickson

The most critical competition in the arts is competition for artists' time. The number of hours in a day and the number of days in a year are the same for artists as they are for everyone else. The priorities and activities that vie for a piece of the daily 24 in the lives of people in general do so as well in the lives of artists. And in those 24 hours that are barely sufficient for people in general to meet their priorities and do what they need to do, artists must take time also to make their art. The number of hours in a day remains unchanged, so artists must sacrifice other priorities and activities to make time for creative activity. Whichever path we take, we have to give something up. And the more we have, the more we must lose. Artists, having more, must lose more. Time is our ultimate limitation. - Aviel Goodman

I decided to participate because it's interesting to take the process of selection (done in this case by MCAD/Jerome) and air it out to an audience to let them come to their own conclusions. - Scott Nedrelow

I think that it is very noble of Monica to share her award from the Jerome Foundation with other emerging artists. I am happy to be able to participate in her exhibition. Art, the grant process, and the process of getting your work recognized are all subjective and difficult to navigate. There are many good artists out there that never get recognized. There are only so many venues, grants, and opportunities for recognition; and for Monica to share her award is a very nice thing to do. - Philip Anderson

I view the grant process as a shot in the dark, and time consuming. - Susan Horn

I spent a year teaching drawing as visiting artist at MCAD and since then have been invited to present my work in lecture as well as critique the work of graduate students. So I feel a close connection to MCAD and appreciate being invited to exhibit in this context to continue dialogue with students and community.- Perci Chester

The grant process can resemble an arbitrary separation of curds and whey. I think they are both quite tasty! - Susan Opitz

Applying for grants is like putting your art under the pillow and waiting for the tooth fairy, and two months later a letter appears saying that you will or won't get the quarter. A show of emerging artists and grant applicants demystifies the grant process to some degree, putting names and images to one's competitors, revealing a human dimension that gets lost in the shuffle of applications and notifications. - Timothy Brott

My participation in this project is partly gameful opportunism and partly a critique of the non-profit (and governmental) art funding propaganda machine, i.e. "grants and fellowships," and the artwork generated with that funding. Still, to be frank, my finances are a mess, and I would not turn down free money. Would you? - Steven Lang

know who has been fortunate enough to receive one of these grants almost immediately forgets his or her good fortune and begins plotting even more intently to go after the next batch of grants.

The final irony is, despite the poisonous jealousy and competition that comes from these annual scrambles for the fleeting cash trophies of foundation grants in Minnesota, no one single artist—I'm guessing—would propose that we do away with the grants. If I suggested, for instance, that we pool all this money and divide it equally among anyone and everyone who made art in the state during a given year—yielding each artist at best an annual award of perhaps \$5.40—I'd no doubt be laughed out of the room. And rightly so. No artist would give up the slim chance of hitting a career-validating lottery—taking in a cool \$20K or even \$40K—for the sure shot at such paltry chump change.

This fact alone proves that, in some strange way, in the arts the very air of competition is what drives artists to continue striving. Every artist secretly wants, above all else, to become the chief alpha dog of art. That's the big prize for artists—to struggle mightily but in the end to triumph completely over every other artist. The art race is as much a draw to artists as the making of art.

In the end, while we all know that a world of hurt, frustration, and disappointment can result in a hypercompetitive field such as art, we also know that such an atmosphere is preferable to the opposite. It's natural for artists to imagine what cannot be—a world in which nastiness could be kept in check, where everyone could help each other to get ahead in an arts-ambivalent world, and in which collaboration and harmony brings us all together. It's a natural wish, but one that is as impossible as it ultimately is undesirable—in the same way as a freezer full of vanilla ice cream would be a waste of space.

Competition and contention often yield good things, and in art these factors may be necessary to guarantee each succeeding generation surpasses the previous. After all, two of the students of Jacques-Louis David who faced much of the master's fiercest scrutiny, Antoine-Jean Gros and Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, survived to become two of the most prominent artists of the age that followed David.

Every artist should remember these two figures the next time they feel so frustrated or jealous that they want to chuck their brushes and paints in the proverbial river. No victory or award ever went to the competitor who gave up the fight.

Competition may be, in the end, an evil that is essential to the advancement of art.

I want to participate because I believe that the work of Monica Sheets is extremely valid and thought provoking. I do feel that it will help demystify the process of artist selection in grant processes in general. Plus we get to see more stuff. Competition in the arts is a healthy thing but artists need more venues and more support. - Peter Morales

Applying for a grant is like applying for your dream job - most people only have to apply once in their life; as artists, we have to apply and face rejection more times than we can count. The fear of not applying and not getting your work out into the public eye is greater than the fear of rejection, which is perhaps why we keep doing this. - Jes Lee

The invitation to participate in an ironic twist on grant competition intrigued me. The piece takes the role of judge away from the experts and awards it to the viewer. - Barbara Claussen

Submitting a grant proposal makes me concretely plan for the future. However, once submitted, I have released control of my future: forget about the plans I made, make some new plans and do it myself. - Ron Merchant

I decided to participate in this show for fairly simple reasons- I like to show my work and share it with others, and being in arts administration, I know how subjective review panels can be, and it can take a very long time (sometimes never!) to receive a grant or recognition for one's work. So why not take the opportunity to show people that even though I may not receive monetary assistance to make work that I believe in, I keep making it, because I am an artist, and I will always find a way to share my ideas with the world. - Jes Schrom

I think that the project sounded interesting and I want to see if it will develop a dialog between its participants. - Kirsten Peterson

When I apply for a grant or for an exhibition I realize that the selection process is quite subjective. It is easy to see the work of the artists that were accepted, but not the work that was rejected. I am as excited to see this exhibit as I am to be in it. - Jeffrey Kalstrom

I view the grant process as a necessary act/process in which artists must participate - not necessarily for project funding, but as a recognition and resume building tool. These opportunities, I believe direct the future successes of an artist working today. I have decided to participate in this project because I believe that unsuccessful proposals find their way to completion. As artists we have no choice but to move forward. - Kimberly Tschida Petters

The community of committed emerging artists in Minnesota is too diverse to be represented by the "winners" in a single granting process. The parallel show gives a rare inside look at a wider range of creative activity and provides the opportunity to make personal reflections on this strange annual evaluation. - Adam Reef

I have joined Monica on this collaborative project because my interdisciplinary artwork often questions repressive sociopolitical and museological structures. One objective of mine is to question traditional artistic distribution methods and to cross conceptual boundaries, leading to a better understanding of the issues of power and powerlessness. An artistic and conceptual goal for me is one that opens new conduits between institutions and communities that have historically been separate. Working with Monica has supported these goals and objectives. - Pete Driessen