CURATORIAL STATEMENT

Artists help us see where we’ve come from, the beauty and realities of the present, and inspire us for a better and more beautiful tomorrow. The work of artists, in the most expansive definition of that word, must be valued and celebrated in our society. The Oklahoma Visual Arts Coalition is more important than ever before. At a time when truth and basic human rights are up for debate, artists play a vital role in those conversations—making our world more equitable and honest.

When looking through the record-breaking number of submissions for this year’s fellowships, I reflected on the personal stories of the people making art in Oklahoma—and the long history of creativity and storytelling in the state. The works of Skip Hill and Jason Cytacki stood out to me for their techniques, personal narratives, and their contributions to the arts. Dimana Bazrbashi and Claire Dabney have talent that needs to be fostered and supported. I hope they utilize the student fellowship to advance their education and nurture their talents as the next generation of artists.

These four artists are exceptional examples of the people that make up the great state of Oklahoma. They are not the only artists who should be supported and celebrated. Thank you to everyone who submitted work to this year’s fellowship programs. I encourage you to continue to apply and to become involved in OVAC. To every artist in Oklahoma, keep making, seeing, feeling, and inspiring us.

Dylan Turk, 2021 Fellowship Awards Guest Curator

2021 FELLOWS

Jason Cytacki is an Associate Professor of Painting at the University of Oklahoma. Jason earned his MFA from the University of Notre Dame in 2011 and now lives and works in Norman, Oklahoma with his wife and children. His work examines the underlying framework that mediates the values, meanings and symbols of the world we inhabit. His work is represented in commercial galleries including JRB Art at the Elms in Oklahoma City and is part of the permanent collection of the Rockwell Museum in Corning, NY.

www.jasoncytacki.com

Skip Hill was born in 1961 in Padre Island, Texas but grew up living in the Oklahoma City area. The lure of wanderlust took him to many places around the world, including Mexico, Thailand, the Netherlands, Morocco, and Prague. Shortly after returning to Oklahoma in 1992, Skip Hill studied at the Fred Jones School of Art at the University of Oklahoma with noted Native American conceptual artist Hachivi Edgar Heap of Birds and influential abstract painter George Bogart. Since then, Hill’s colorful and lyrical works have been exhibited extensively throughout the state in cultural institutions and galleries that include Oklahoma Contemporary, Fred Jones Museum of Art, The Betty Price Gallery at the Oklahoma State Capitol, Gaylord-Pickens Museum, Goddard Art Center, Untitled ArtSpace, Living Arts of Tulsa, 108 (Contemporary, Phibbs Museum of Art, JRB Art at the Elms Gallery and Mainstage Gallery. Skip Hill’s original painting The Dream Sower was inducted into the Oklahoma State Art Collection by the Oklahoma Arts Council in 2014.

www.skiphillart.com

2021 STUDENT FELLOWS

Dimana Bazrbashi is an artist born in Sliven, Bulgaria. She is currently based in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma where she grew up. She studied at Oklahoma City University for two years and completed her BFA in Studio Art at the University of Oklahoma in 2021. Mainly working in paint, she is currently exploring themes of identity and isolation in her work.

Claire Dabney is an Oklahoma-based artist who works in photography, oil paint, and fiber arts. Dabney’s photographic work focuses on feminist iconography, while her paintings confront social issues and mental health. Dabney is currently finishing her final semester of undergraduate studies at Oklahoma State University with a focus on oil painting. Her work has been showcased in Modella Gallery’s Faces of COVID exhibit, as well as OVAC’s Momentum show. Though her career is just beginning, she is extremely hopeful and motivated for the years to come.

www.curatedbykin.com

2021 STUDENT FELLOWS

Dimana Bazrbashi is an artist born in Sliven, Bulgaria. She is currently based in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma where she grew up. She studied at Oklahoma City University for two years and completed her BFA in Studio Art at the University of Oklahoma in 2021. Mainly working in paint, she is currently exploring themes of identity and isolation in her work.

Claire Dabney is an Oklahoma-based artist who works in photography, oil paint, and fiber arts. Dabney’s photographic work focuses on feminist iconography, while her paintings confront social issues and mental health. Dabney is currently finishing her final semester of undergraduate studies at Oklahoma State University with a focus on oil painting. Her work has been showcased in Modella Gallery’s Faces of COVID exhibit, as well as OVAC’s Momentum show. Though her career is just beginning, she is extremely hopeful and motivated for the years to come.

www.curatedbykin.com
These works present serene meditations on everyday Midwestern scenes. In my painted work, dramatic lighting creates cinematic scenes existing at the threshold of something ending or perhaps something that is yet to come. Upon closer inspection, visible details such as the corrugation of the cardboard and tape reveal that each image actually depicts a hand-built miniature set. The illusion of reality dissolves suggesting fragility and artifice.

My sculptural works continue this sense of artificially constructed reality. Pieces of walls, furniture, and objects are all recreations from my childhood home in Indiana and related spaces. Inspired by the crumbling wonders of classical ruins, these life-sized fragments are painstakingly reconstructed from family photos, archival images, and my own memories. Each piece is somehow incomplete. Drawings are unfinished and structural elements are left exposed; this stereotypical Midwestern American world fades but may never have actually existed at all. Much as classical ruins reflect an irretrievable halcyon era, these sculptures create a sense of unattainable reality, a futile recreation of a seemingly perfect past.

Reconfiguring the world using the technique of collage and mixed mediums is at the heart of my art practice. I decontextualize. I rearrange. Then I reconstruct using hand-cut paper, acrylics, and inks, to produce colorful drawings, paintings, and murals that establish a personal world of lyrical moods, and lush, visual experience.

Frequently my art features imaginative portraits that revisit and reorder perceptions of beauty and representation. I centralize the figure within verdant environments of ecstatically dense, yet balanced compositions of seemingly chaotic arrangements. The aesthetic of my paintings is drawn from African American folk art, African tribal motifs, and contemporary popular culture. My art is most profoundly informed by narratives, intuition, improvisation, and the act of creating order out of the remnants and scraps of disorder scattered about my studio.

Tending to keep it personal, I look to close friends and family as well as the environment around me for reference. People are a perpetual curiosity that I explore through painting. When painting people, my backgrounds have imagery that connects with the person depicted and clues into their identity and personality. Self-portraits are the subject I find myself most frequently revisiting. I see my work as a journal of my life, a way for me to discuss the personal in the way I’m most comfortable, with paint. Watercolor has been my favorite medium to work with for its translucency and unforgiving nature.

Themes of isolation have been brought up in recent work as I reflect on my experience in a rapidly changing world through my quiet, individual perspective. I take note of the feeling of separation from this fast-paced reality. Through self-portraits, I started diving deeper into my own identity, my Bulgarian roots, and have found interest in traditional embroidery. By beginning to incorporate embroidery into my paintings, I’m furthering my knowledge on my background.

In my most recent work, I strive to create meaningful pieces that everyone can relate to in some way. Viewers will see subjects ranging from COVID and repressed anger to body image and mental health. I employ paint and film to detail personal hardships I have had to endure and subjects that can be rather emotionally complex.

My newfound signature in my painting work is my use of embroidery floss; I have found that it creates a spectacular deepening effect in the work and makes the figures seem tactile enough to interact with. When experiencing my art, I hope that every person sees a part of themselves that just seems too terrifying to face without the support of community. May those dark corners of your mind be brightened with the knowledge that you are not alone.