

It was a pleasure and a privilege to be invited to judge *Growth*, the final exhibition dedicated to the Gainesville Fine Arts Association's governing values during its one-hundred-year anniversary in 2023.

I thank all the artists who contributed to this show for sharing their works and contributing to Gainesville's vibrant culture.

Growth is an apt theme to explore in artmaking. The word at once implies a sense of becoming, a development, an expansion, an evolution, and a maturation, among other meanings, and it applies to ourselves, our communities, and the natural world.

For Best in Show, I selected ***Flash of the Oriole* by Candace McCaffery**, a quilted wall hanging that shows how growth is the product of meticulous labor, stitch by stitch. Textile leaves of a ginkgo tree—the “living fossil” and oldest tree species on earth—flutter and fall, blending into a kaleidoscopic swirl of different fabrics, colors, and floral and abstract patterns. A sweeping diagonal of orange and black suggests the wings of an oriole while the composition's circular forms allude to eddies, pools, and suns. What will come from this mélange of flora and fauna? Working within the domestic, feminine, and craft conditions of quilting, McCaffery's work transforms its material fabrics into an object of fine art.

For the Award of Excellence, I chose ***Experiments with Collage and Interference with Black and White “Noise” I* by Maria Leite**, which suggests (perhaps) that growth is painful. I was moved by this abstract mixed-media work, with its array of paints and collaged papers evoking a shedding of bandages and skins. To grow, one must cast off the old, a difficult experience for many. Hanging skeins, discarded dressings—situated against a tonal field of black and white brushwork—seem to allude to remnants of an evolution that has already passed.

3<sup>rd</sup> Place went to ***It Takes a Team* by Karen Koegel**, which shows that growth is communal (and oftentimes unpredictable). In this work, a scene of collective gardening gives way to an otherworldly cabbage-creature, whose leaves elevate an enlarged earthworm to the sky. Here, the surreal seems to undercut any potential literalism of the metaphor of growth, as human shearing and pruning produce a hybrid cruciferous body that comes to dominate the collaged composition, evoking a benevolent vegetal deity.

Merit Awards go to:

***Growth* by Patti Barker**, which materializes the exhibition's theme so perfectly, shaping soft felt into an impressive standing tree that grows against gravity

***The Building Blocks Of* by Johnny Coleman**, which shows how growth can be playful (and delightfully weird), offering a display of toy bricks oddly anthropomorphic in form, painted in the legacies of Pop Art

And three works which show how the theme of Growth is so well captured in the depiction of nature:

***Resplendence of Tulips #8* by Christine Brundige**, whose watercolor flowers were so delicate and beautiful in both their linework and color

***Growth Can Be Prickly* by Erica Davis-Jackson**, whose cheery houseplants delighted me (particularly the delicate spines of the cactus and the chartreuse color-shifting edges of the snake plant)

***Cellon Oak in Winter* by Bill Ragan**, a stunning photograph which shows the largest live oak in Florida. This majestic tree feels like an old friend to many and Ragan's crisp photograph prompts us to see it anew.

Thank you again for sharing your work with Gainesville's community. I look forward to seeing how GFAA continues to grow as it moves into its 101<sup>st</sup> year!

— Rachel Silveri (Assistant Professor, School of Art + Art History, University of Florida)