



# SCENE

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## Bethesda Painting Awards a winner (mostly)

The best show in years of finalists for the Bethesda Painting Awards is on view at the Fraser Gallery in Bethesda. Community activist and arts supporter Carol Trawick established the regional competition, now in its sixth year, with generous cash prizes.

### On View

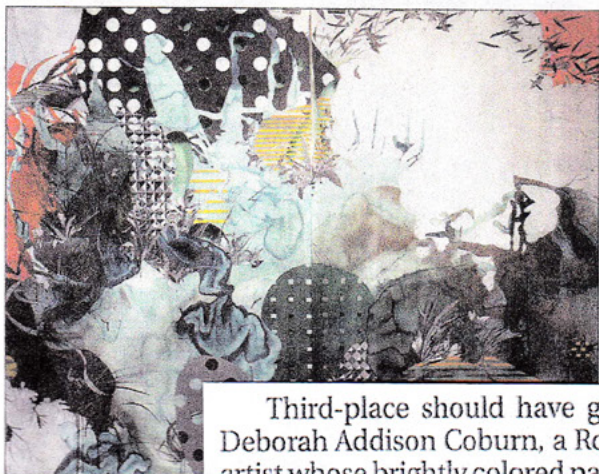
CLAUDIA ROUSSEAU

Overall, the works selected for the exhibit show a significant diversity of styles, with both realism and abstraction well represented. Most rewarding is the fact that all these artists show a real dedication to painting in the true sense of the word, deeply thought out and not lightly executed. Finalist Sheila Blake's comment at the awards ceremony was well taken.

"Being a painter," she said, "to really be a painter, takes a long time."

One has the sense that regardless of the ages of these nine artists, a slowly realized and ongoing commitment to the art of painting distinguishes their work.

The jurors awarded the "Best in Show," or first-place, to Nora Sturges, associate professor of art and head of painting and drawing at Towson University. Working on a diminutive scale in oil on fiberboard panels, Sturges' paintings are miniature worlds, com-



Katherine Mann's huge "Fili-ree" with acrylic colors and c

pletely fantasized, but co details of the real world. realist technique gives t photographic feeling, but t matter makes them feel especially the smallest measure about 3 by 4 inci

Third-place should have gone to Deborah Addison Coburn, a Rockville artist whose brightly colored paintings were far stronger than the winner of that honor. Instead, it was bestowed on Deborah Ellis whose work was, in my view, the weakest in the show. Her oil and watercolor landscapes were pedestrian at best, reminiscent of a nice greeting card. On the other hand, Coburn's work is strongly original, with bold forms intersecting in interesting patterns. A bit suggestive of

Emerging artist Katherine Mann earned second place, with the center portion of a huge work entitled "Fili-ree" that in its entirety spans more than 30 feet. Mann, the only returning finalist from last year's contest, has been a Hamiltonian Fellow, a prestigious award from the eponymous gallery in Washington, D.C., in the interim. Her work is both two- and three-dimensional, with cut paper sections suspended against a backing painted with acrylic and sumi ink. "Fili-ree" is especially connotative of landscape, but not in any traditional sense. Mann's paintings are, as she put it, "fantastic abstract environments," full of hints of vegetation and other organic forms without specific repre-

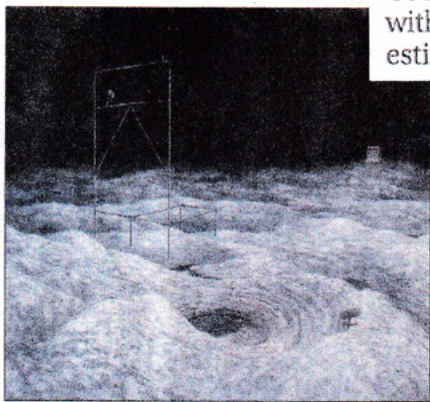
Willem De Kooning's abstract expressionist paintings like "Excavation" (1950), whose influence, the artist admits, resulted in Coburn's idea to make figurative drawings and then cut them up to make collages that form the basis for her abstractions. Like many abstract expressionist works of the past, these have landscape titles like "The Desert Renews Itself." They are powerfully visual, with unexpected perspective shifts and geometric versus organic contrasts.

James Halloran, the only male artist in the group, is a young painter with an interesting idea that needs development. Of his three paintings in the show, "Hallway" is the most compelling. This, a small square canvas

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The magic realism of Nora Sturges' paintings of the Arctic is intriguing. In "Blind," the apparatus of environmental research looms over an imperiled landscape while stars twinkle in the distance.

PHOTO FROM NORA STURGES



### PAINTING

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sources, or at least some reference to an ongoing meditation on American themes, that is, a self-consciousness about being an American artist at the start of the 21st century with all that significant art and literature behind you. My favorite, and a work that captured the attention of most viewers, was a large canvas titled "That Strange Red Afternoon."

The painting shows a broad area of orange-red clouds that tower over

a small building with cars parked outside. The title quotes a line from Jack Kerouac's "On the Road," perhaps the quintessential American novel. Kerouac wrote: "I woke up as the sun was reddening ... I was halfway across America, at the dividing line between the East of my youth and the West of my future, and maybe that's why it happened right there and then, that strange red afternoon." Something young, exciting and hopeful comes from this painting, something very much akin to that energy so many have found in Kerouac's words.