

2021 Juror Statement

How do you decide between a boy at a zoo, reaching out to touch a polar bear, and a woman giving comfort to an elderly dog? Photos like these do not depend on craft or composition alone; they are both examples of what straight photography does best. It gives us the opportunity to share moments that seem memorable. But deciding is the judge's job, so perhaps it will help to say that if I have a bias it is for an interesting subject simply seen. As John Szarkowski, former curator of photography at the Museum of Modern Art, famously suggested: "One might compare the art of photography to the act of pointing. All of us, even the best-mannered of us, occasionally point, and it must be true that some of us point to more interesting facts, events, circumstances, and configurations than others." For me, this simple act of pointing is the core of photography's strength.

But much like our taste in music, there are times when we want to hear something different, something that surprises us, delights us. The world of music is too rich to only listen to one category - the same is true of art, and of photography. The work in this exhibition allowed me to explore that wide range, to be surprised and delighted. The impressive thing is that there is still the desire to use a camera to share our singular vision of the world, be it our backyards, our family, or our most distant travels. I would like to thank all who submitted work for letting me see what they have seen, letting me spend a few hours standing behind them and their cameras.

Mike Sinclair, December 2021

Mike Sinclair is a professional photographer and Professor of Practice in the University of Kansas Department of Design photography program. His work has been published in the New York Times, Time, and Harpers, and is included in the collections of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, and the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston. He received a Guggenheim Fellowship in 2013 and published collections of his images in the books "The Nelson" and "Troost Avenue."