



## ***2021 Smoky Hills Juror's Statement***

It was a great pleasure to select and judge the art entered into this 52<sup>nd</sup> Smoky Hill Exhibit. Brenda Meder's organization and presentation of the artworks under consideration was unrivaled in my experience of jurying similar competitions. I selected works to be included in the exhibit using a set of professional quality photographs. I then traveled to Hays to make final decisions on award winning pieces. Brenda had curated and installed the show with a great eye, displaying and lighting the art in a manner that not only brought out the best in each piece but also created a kind of dialogue among related art objects.

Awarding prizes to the assembled artworks was the difficult aspect of the process because each one had been selected for its unique qualities and stood on its own as an object to contemplate and admire. Nevertheless it was a pleasant challenge looking at each painting, print, photograph, and sculpture intimately and with plenty of time to enjoy each work in the show individually.

My criteria for both inclusion and awards were as follows. My primary criterion is **originality**, both in an absolute sense and also within the artist's body of work. Gordon Sherman's large painting, "Swan Fan", was in many ways a departure from his usual works, so much so that I did not realize it was created by him. My second criterion, **fine craftsmanship**, is embodied by Stan Detrixhe's collage, "Bonfire of the Banalities." The published images comprising it transcended their origins and his complex manipulations of them, as well as his surface treatment were quite transformative. My third criterion, **emotional impact**, is the most subjective aspect of a very subjective process. Zane Mahanna's iron sculpture, "Little White Lies," of an iron Nazi puppet, is clever (the marionette controller from which the puppet hangs makes a swastika shadow on the wall and its weight makes it virtually unusable). The soldier's bucktooth dentition is humorous and yet the figure is quite sinister. All of which creates a rather complex satiric statement.

Finally, it was an honor to be chosen as the exhibit's juror. The Smoky Hill has a long and honored reputation for quality. This year's show is a great example of why it has endured. Many thanks. It was a memorable and fun experience.

***Jay Nelson, May 2021***

**Jay Nelson** is an art curator and former owner and director of the Strecker Nelson Gallery. Curatorial and collection projects include those for the ***Kansas Masters Biennial, Flint Hills Masters, Art Kansas*** and the ***Meadowlark Hills Art Collection***. He was a Kansas Arts Commissioner and served on the advisory board of the Manhattan Arts & Humanities Board. With his wife Barbara, he received the 2008 "Kansas Governor's Award" from Kathleen Sebelius for arts advocacy.