



Juror Statement: Laura Hoptman, Senior Curator, New Museum of Contemporary Art

For anyone who might doubt the significance of contemporary art practice in today's globalized, media mad culture, the gratifying results of open calls for artwork stand as a rebuke. The 2007 International Juried Show attracted 1,800 entries from artists from fourteen countries as well as from all over the U.S. From this astonishingly diverse group that included paintings, drawings, sculpture, installation, and photography, 126 objects were selected. These range from rather straightforward oil on canvas portraits, to delicate embroidery, to ceramics, to fanciful golden pigs which fly across the gallery. This variety is indicative of the polymorphous richness of contemporary art at the beginning of the new millennium. In the last hundred or so years of the 1900s, contemporary visual culture was looked at in terms of progress, in this case, away from the ability to recapitulate the world and towards the ability to abstract it. Nowadays, things are not so simple, but are all the more interesting for it. Recuperated time-honored mediums and styles have joined with new mediums to create an open field for any and all modes of expression, from figuration to conceptualism, from high abstraction to visual languages based in traditional crafts. If any thread can be followed, it is that of the narrative which courses through a majority of the works in the show. Regardless of medium, many artists today are interested in telling stories that range from the highly personal (in the numerous photographs of home interiors) to the topical.

Art may not reflect the world situation but it certainly is a product of it; this year in particular, a significant number of artists have chosen subjects torn from the headlines. Masked figures in balaclavas, tanks, a burned-out vehicle silhouetted by flames remind us that the pleasures of art appreciation not only sooth but sometimes make us more aware of the world and our place in it. There is a genuine thrill to be got from witnessing consummate skill as exemplified by this year's best in show, a tour de force of controlled draftsmanship. Virtuosity alone, though, doesn't make a masterpiece, because in the end it is a vehicle, not an end in itself. There have been countless arguments over the issue of connoisseurship, and no agreement as to what, in the end, makes art, Art. What we do know, is that there is tremendous beauty in the natural world, poignancy in some of the tiniest aspects of daily life, and artfulness to be found in many areas of the fine arts and crafts. What makes art, Art though, is neither skill nor cleverness, nor innovation, nor even a compelling subject, but these in combination with the capability to awaken in the viewer a sense of his/her aliveness to the world. That, our prizewinner does, as this pencil portrait of a well dressed lady of some fifty or sixty years ago is not only astonishingly drawn, but tenderly conveyed. Although she is clearly an individual, from a certain family, social class, geographical area, this specificity in no way keeps us from relating to her, even respecting her. The work copied from a photograph, proves that it is an image clearly cherished, venerated enough to have been painstakingly reproduced by hand. The winning work then, is not only a great drawing—it is an homage to its subject and all the many things she makes us feel.¹

¹Laura Hoptman awarded *Theresa (1948)* best in show and discussed the drawing in this statement.