

When I jury a competition like The Creative Portrait, the process is blind, meaning that I don't know who created the various images. I curate the show, sequencing pictures in my mind, pairing photographs, choosing a wide swath of portraiture and making tough choices about what to have in the exhibition, especially when I can only select 50 out of 1,000 photographs. I picked my best of show image without knowing who the artist was, a picture unlike most of the other entries. A woman on a high peak, a stormy sky above her, a green valley stretching out before her, the shadows of clouds moving below her across the blanket of the land, and her identity veiled by her blowing red hair. I think of the film, "The Diving Bell and The Butterfly" and the scene when the woman is driving the convertible and her mane of red hair is flying as she speeds along, music blaring, the movement of the hair electric and riveting, a memory that is as untouchable as that wild hair. This photograph, the mystery of it, the pristine land, the moment full of hope and something even more intangible. I want to be back on the knife's edge of Mount Katahdin in Maine, the very end of the Appalachians, and feel the wind trying to rip me off that ridge. The woman in the frame of this photograph is too powerful though to be blown away. It is that, when a photograph transports me thousands of miles away to a memory of a time and place that I'd forgotten, this is what makes me love photography. And jurying. This image was made by JP Terlizzi, a moment he witnessed and then gave to us as a gift.

I think of the other portraits in the show, women body builders and children looking like adults and adults dressed as superheroes or wild west characters or wearing nothing but their skin. Vulnerable, powerful, human. There are selections of found photographs woven with thread or laid over with pigment or repurposed by the artists. There are documentary portraits that take my breath away and there are environmental portraits that match the best of the genre. There are formal portraits and self-portraits that investigate much more than the surface. There are collodion images and Polaroids and alternative process prints and prints from toy cameras and what could be a negative disintegrating before my eyes. There is a fragmented face put back together and an underwater portrait and a figure frozen in ice. There are images that are about light and movement and time and how really, it is all fleeting. There are journeys and narratives and stories and then pauses when I need one.

I'm excited to see this show in person in a few weeks and experience the intimacies and the overtures and the vision of each of the artists' interpretations of the portrait. Congratulations to all of the artists!

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