

# The craft of judging art

Perhaps one of the most challenging things for an artist is being judged by others, whether it's by a visitor at an art exhibit or by a juror for an art competition. Art does not fit into a given shape and is not limited by a spectrum of colors.

Art is subjective, unique and original — and always personal.

West Michigan artists will again subject their work — as well as their reputations and egos — to scrutiny at the Regional Arts Competition, part of the 36th annual arts extravaganza known as

Festival of the Arts, set this year for June 3-5. There is no age limit, and artists may include photographers, sculptors, painters, metalworkers, jewelry makers, furniture makers, ceramists and printmakers. Cash awards from \$175 to \$1,000 are presented as well as a People's Choice Award.

More than 400 art works are expected to be part of this year's competition, which will be exhibited through June 10 at the Grand Rapids Art Museum. The competition is open to residents of eight counties — Allegan, Barry, Ionia, Kent, Montcalm, Muskegon, Newaygo and Ottawa — from which the jurors are also selected.

"I look to whether a piece is made with the awareness that a work of art is more than a picture. It needs to become a metaphor for something more — the parts need to work toward a greater whole."  
— Art Martin

By Dianna Stampfler  
Photography by Michael Buck



"My rationale has been the same as (that of) the founders of the event, in that we are showcasing the arts of West Michigan to the community and we should also have a juror from the area," said Fred Bivins, competition committee chair.

This year's juror certainly fits that ideal. Art Martin, registrar at the Muskegon Museum of Art, has assisted in the coordination of the annual MMA Regional Exhibit for the past four years. He is also co-creator of the museum's Salon Thursdays program, an event for regional artists to showcase their work and connect with fellow artists.

Also an award-winning artist, Martin has a master's degree in fine arts in painting and a bachelor's of fine arts in painting and drawing. He has participated in numerous national and regional juried exhibits and has served as an adjunct professor at Grand Valley State University, teaching life and foundation drawing courses.

Martin said jurying includes the challenge of balancing respect and admiration for anyone engaged in a creative act with personal feelings about quality — and quality is the starting point.

"I look to whether a piece is made with the awareness that a work of art is more than a picture," he said. "It needs to become a metaphor for something more — the parts need to work toward a greater whole."

Other creative process components must then coalesce, agreed husband-and-wife Meridith Ridl and Jason Kalajainen, who served as jurors last year.

"In jurying, we look at technical skill, compositional inventiveness, conceptual strength," said Ridl, an artist and Holland Christian High School teacher. "We looked for artists trying something new — even unique. We looked at artists who were able to do again something that has been done for ages, exceptionally well."

Laura and Gordon Goodrich served as jurors in 2002 and have been involved

in Festival for 33 years.

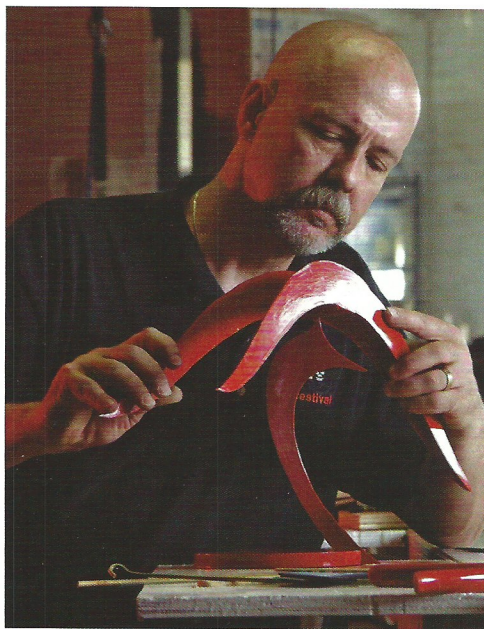
"We wanted as varied a spectrum as possible in imagery and technique," said Gordon Goodrich, an accredited industrial designer who studied at the Chicago Institute of Design and the Arts Center of Los Angeles. "We wanted work that was broadly representative of this region. We wanted interesting work. We wanted work with high artistic merit. We wanted work that would talk to you — the viewer. We think we got it."

Eastown artist John Despres — who planned to enter two sculptures in this year's competition — said he never creates a piece with the mindset of entering it into a contest. That decision might come later, based on comments from admirers or his own response to it.

"It's a little thrilling to have it accepted," Despres said. "But it doesn't trouble me in the least if it's not. It's one person's reaction to my work and there are enough people out there who react positively to it."

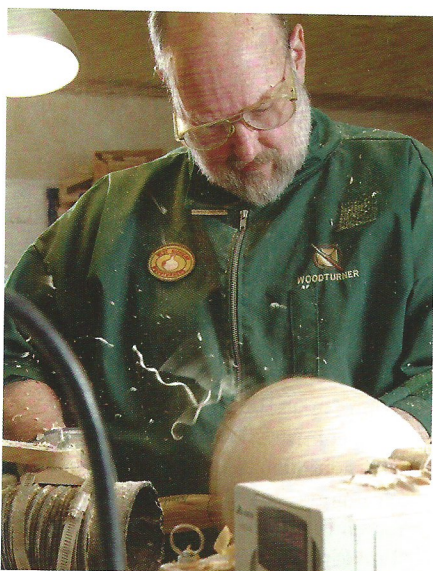
Grand Rapids artist Roger Timermanis, who is submitting a pastel and a

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Artists Roger Timermanis, above, and John Despres agree that while it's satisfying to have their works judged by peers, neither create a piece with the sole purpose of entering it into a contest. "Competition doesn't even enter my mind," Timermanis said.





Regional Arts Competition chair Fred Bivins:  
"The more secure you are in your medium,  
the less you will tailor it to competition."

## judging art

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larger painting for the competition, agreed that the foremost critic is the artist.

"Competition doesn't even enter my mind. The only thing it has to meet is my requirements — my standards for color, approach, design, composition. But it's always nice to have other artists and peers judge your work."

Art trends change from year to year, sometimes reflecting what is selling well in an area or what is taught in the local schools. No matter the reason, the trends are reflective of the area, and jurors recognize and embrace this.

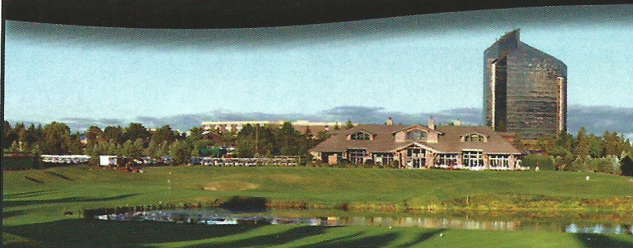
"Regional arts competitions are truly an opportunity to see first hand the breadth of work being created within an area," said Amy Braun Heiney, 2003 Festival juror and program director for Art-Works. "West Michigan is a thriving and dynamic community for the arts."

Martin concurred that "dynamic" is an essential artistic requisite, issuing this advice for artists new to competition.

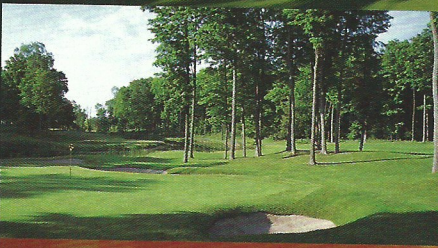
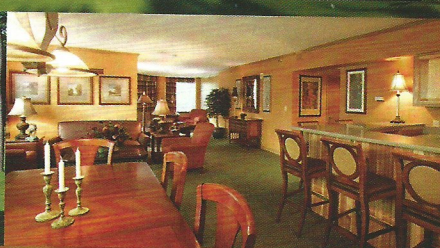
"Two things to consider are presentation — it needs to look professional — and craft, which is almost certainly going to be an issue, depending on the media. And avoid clichés, things that are overly precious or sentimental. There are themes that are so familiar to everyone that might reflect moments too deeply personal to that one artist. It depends on the show, but there is a benchmark where you have to say, 'I'm a serious artist ... who is serious about more than making pictures.'"


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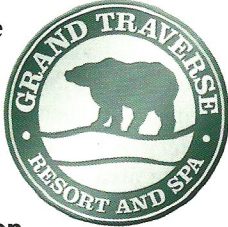






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