

Long Island Biennial celebrates 'The Body Politic'



Meredith A. Brown, consulting curator of contemporary art at The Heckscher Museum of Art in Huntington, helped put together "The Body Politic." Credit: Rick Kopstein

By Mary Gregory[Special to Newsday](#) Updated November 2, 2024 9:09 am
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Artist Hwa Young Caruso, of East Meadow, has had a distinguished career in her field. She holds a PhD from Columbia University, has exhibited her work internationally and has been a professor of art at Molloy University in Rockville Centre for the past two decades. But this year marks the first time she applied for entry to the Long Island Biennial at The Heckscher Museum of Art in Huntington, which runs through Jan. 19, and for the first time has a theme, "The Body Politic."

"Political dialogue and political debate about the world's issues and Americans issues," Caruso said, "are very educational and very healthy for the democratic process." When she was growing up in South Korea, she noted, "My family and friends, teachers and professors could not openly discuss or criticize the government."

Caruso's linocut "Belonging" depicts two maps of the United States on the left and a map of her homeland, South Korea, on the right. Down the center are the outlines of three infants, representing innocence, potential and hope. It's all about, she said, "how to fit into the complex American social and cultural fabric."

Hers was one of 762 entries from 313 artists for the eighth annual Biennial. Jurors Ian Alteveer, who chairs the department of contemporary art at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Patricia Cronin, a sculptor, professor at Brooklyn College and artistic director of the LGBTQ+ VR Museum; and Grace Hong,

assistant director of New York's Galerie Lelong & Co., chose 60 artists. They present an exhibition as varied and thought-provoking as the issues of the day and the population of Long Island.

ARTISTS WITH SOMETHING TO SAY



"Pink Shoes," a 2022 archival inkjet print by Susan Kozodoy, of Lynbrook, is part of the Long Island Biennial. Credit: Rick Kopstein

Visitors will find paintings, drawings, prints, photographs and sculptures that address environmental concerns, immigration, politics, gender, race, health, wealth and justice in ways that are direct, suggested or mysterious. That's where the artists' carefully wrought statements and the curatorial acumen of the Heckscher's consulting curator of contemporary art, Meredith A. Brown, come in.

While Brown wasn't part of the selection committee, she did select the jurors. "I had a little thumb on the scale in terms of choices," she said, adding, "I was surprised by the quality of the work and the level of artists. The jurors had a really hard time narrowing it down." The show fills every gallery with the work of professional and amateur artists, and all have something to say.

In the painting "Ordinary Lives Matter," Herold Alexis, of Medford, brings the political itself into question by stating his apolitical stance. Andrea Baatz, of Bohemia, depicted fish in "Schooling Patterns: Discontinuity," questioning the independence of nature when human activity intervenes. Rather than a classical still life, Northport's Alisa M. Shea painted empty yellow pill bottles, and Babylon artist Maria Spector's paintings transform classical compositions with bright candy wrappers and sly feminist references to art history.

"The role of all contemporary artists is one of observing our world and reflecting it back in some way," said Brown. "So, it's a very broad theme and you could come at it from any number of directions."

Valley Stream portraitist Kailee S. Finn's pastel and chalk drawing "Our Scarecrow" uses metaphor and symbols to counteract perceptions of predestination with hope. Both Robert V. Guido of Halesite and

Bellport's Jeremy Grand share thoughts on homelessness and community in their works, and Neil Leinwohl's mazelike monochromatic images conjure a confusing Rube Goldberg machine. "My art is about the rise of authoritarianism and stupidity," the Rockville Centre artist stated.

SPEAKING IN DIFFERENT WAYS



St. James artist Kelynn Alder's "Chamula Accordion Player" is one of several works addressing Mexican culture. Credit: Rick Kopstein

While designing the exhibition, Brown looked for ways to make the works say more in conversation than they would alone. "Kelynn Alder's works, which are large and bright and very striking," she said, "are hanging next to Fernando Carpaneda's small paintings, which are these incredibly photorealistic works. The level is astonishing. Both artists are addressing issues of Mexican and American culture and the border. They have similar themes going on, but they're approaching them in very different ways." Alder, a Mexican American artist, curator and a teacher at Manhattan's School of Visual Arts, depicts ancient rites and rituals that are practiced to this day in small villages like Chamula, Mexico. She said her work is not meant to be political. "How is it political to embrace another culture?" she asked, adding, "I think it's helpful for people to see others as just people. Maybe that brings us hopefully a little closer together."