

“Night Owls” exhibition sparks whimsy and mystery with its nocturnal artworks

CEDARBURG – The nocturnal theme of “Night Owls” for Cedarburg Art Museum’s 2019 juried exhibition attracted entries by artists from Wisconsin and seven other states. A team of three jurors independently scored 100 digital entries on three criteria resulting in 68 selected artworks by 53 artists from Wisconsin and four other states. Themes of whimsy, mystery, and work or social activity characterize these nighttime subjects.

The Art Museum designated awards for its sixth annual juried exhibition “Night Owls.” After selected artworks were received at the museum, the team of jurors collectively determined the award-winning works. A grant from Festivals of Cedarburg, Inc. enabled the museum to give out awards of \$450, \$250, and \$150 for Best of Show, Second and Third Place Awards, respectively, as well as three Honorable Mention Awards.



The Best of Show Award was given to Milwaukee artist Shelby Keefe for her oil painting, *Burning the Midnight Oil* (pictured at left). According to the jurors’ statement, “the masterful and exquisite handling of light, composition, and subject matter make this an outstanding piece fitting to the theme of the exhibition.” The cozy scene in an antique shop late at night implies a human presence or perhaps the artist painting from life is the one burning the midnight oil.

Cedarburg artist Patrick Doughman earned a second-place award with his acrylic engraving entitled “Night Smoke.” This work scored highly for its strong composition, sense of mystery, and use of light and dark. The created scene takes on the 1930s aura of a Dashiell Hammett detective mystery novel with a late-night smoker taking in a clandestine view of interesting back alley activities. The artist’s nod to Midwest Regionalism from the 1930s takes on new meaning with Doughman’s innovative engraving technique on acrylic paint.

The jurors found the oil painting “Dreamwalkers: The Border Never Sleeps” (shown at right) to have a great sense of aroused emotion and tension. Immigrants at a border crossing are on edge because it is not known who is coming in the vehicle with the glaring headlights. The brushstrokes at the sides point inward toward the alarming lights, enhancing the tension. This nighttime scene has heightened contemporary meaning and earned Shorewood artist May Klisch a third-place award.



The Festivals of Cedarburg grant also provided three honorable mention awards, each for \$50 gift certificates to Blick Art Materials. Honorable Mention designees are Pamela Ruschman, Mequon; Doug Witz, West Bend; and Nicolas Umbs, Milwaukee. Ruschman’s oil painting “Night Pasture” captures a dramatic sky and the moonlight and haziness of a humid evening with cows still out at pasture. Doug Witz, creates a mixed media, miniature environment with a boy reading by flashlight in a bed that is being transformed into a scary, creepy creature with haunting effects throughout the bedroom in his “Scary Stories to Tell

in the Dark.” The chilling effect of a wintry night at a diesel fueling pump is the subject of Nic Umbs’ “After Hours – Diesel” photograph that only a night owl could see and experience.

Many of the artists had a whimsical approach to the nocturnal theme. Joan Hollnagel’s *Star Snatcher* reveals an anthropomorphic moon grabbing all the stars that it can in her acrylic painting. Christine Miller, Whitewater, has another mixed media artwork from her ongoing “Mags” series entered nearly every year. *A Blanket Statement by Insomnia-Mags: Think I’m Sleep-Waitressin’ Again* suggests a frazzled waitress doing the night shift either for real or in her sleep. Kristin Gjerdset of West Allis provides a glimpse of all the insect critters that can settle on a single plant species in her acrylic painting, *Milkweed Night Folk* (shown at right). To see them all together, over-size, on one plant species is a delightful artistic and entomological feat.



Some of the artworks exude a sense of mystery in the night. Besides the Klisch and Doughman works already mentioned, Joseph Miller of Buffalo, NY presents two twin-like girls agaze in the moonlight in his oil painting *Offering*, not unlike the dressed-alike girls in the iconic film “The Shining.” Miller’s artwork has a sense of mystery about it with suspense about what may happen or something that just happened. Erik Durant’s bronze figurative sculpture entitled *Dead Rabbits* also presents a mysterious, almost modern mythological scene with questions aroused but not answered about the subject.

Interior scenes like Shelby Keefe’s define late night work; likewise, the oil painting of Lisa Matera of Moorestown, NJ, *Night Shift, Working Past Midnight* suggests a lonely, late night work session without a human presence. Likewise, Michelle McElroy of Maynard, MA depicts a lonely 1980s kitchen scene in her *Night Owl* oil painting.

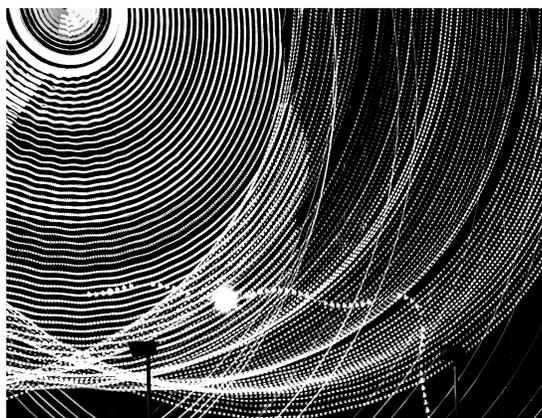


Landscape scenes are also explored in the nocturnal hours. Cedarburg’s Susan Hale depicts an early 20th Century frame church near Cedar Creek in her expressionistic oil painting *Twilight Chapel* (shown at left). Grafton’s Gina Studelska creates a nighttime mixed media collage with hand-dyed fabrics and twigs called *Vespers* as she reminds the viewer of necessary good stewardship toward Mother Earth. Mary Mendla, Grafton, combines cold wax with oil paint in her abstracted *Moonlit Falls* depiction. Dan Rizzi of Plymouth paints a quiet scene of cattails over the marsh in *Horicon Moonrise* in order to remind us of the beauty at the darker side of day.

Several of the artists took the “Night Owl” scene literally and created artwork in their favorite medium to include the nocturnal birds that do most of their work and hunting at night or dawn and dusk hours. Cedarburg’s Bruce Hustad contributes a meticulous and bold pencil drawing entitled *Night Watch* that depicts the avian predator waiting for its next meal. In two mixed media works, Terri Lockwood,

West Bend, uses a photographic image of a barn owl and embeds it in a beeswax, paint, and encaustic mixture that lends itself to suggesting an autumn forest as home to the nocturnal bird of prey. Jewel Riano-Bradley, Mequon, creates a collagraph print of many layers called *After Midnight* that includes many nighttime creatures, slightly abstracted.

Other artists illustrated that nighttime is a busy time for humans and animals alike. A busy social scene is suggested in Chris Behrs' pastel, *Music on the Public Market Patio-Mequon* (shown at right) and in Sherri Thomas' oil painting, *Where Everyone Knows Your Name*. Wendie Thompson, Oconomowoc, and Carolyn Larkin, Pewaukee, depict car hops on skates and the Kiltie drive-in, respectively, in their carefully crafted oil paintings that reveal summertime nighttime outings. Besides her award-winning painting, Pam Ruschman's oil painting *Mr. Sandman* also depicts a farm animal in the moonlight. Valerie Mangion of Muscoda, WI utilizes trail cam snapshots to re-create her own nighttime wildlife scenes in her fool-the-eye oil paintings done in shades of greys, whites, and blacks.



Photography also plays an important role in this exhibition. Jim Rossol of Bailey's Harbor, WI does some magic with his photography creating an abstract work with a long-exposure image of a nighttime county fair ride turned black-and-white in his *Pearls and Ribbons of Light* (shown at left). Riley Arthur of Detroit, MI has created an exhaustive living and historic archive, documenting diners in New York City. Her colorful *Midnight Meal at the Metro Diner* shows one example of a dying American institution. Martin Key of West Bend has two photos in this exhibition that make use of a powerful, hand-held flashlight to illuminate faraway nighttime scenes in photographs *Deer Tracks* and *The Old Barn*. Fred Thorne of Mequon reveals a quintessential winter scene in

downtown Cedarburg before daybreak near his favorite coffee shop.

Most all the works in "Night Owls" are for sale with the exhibition running through January 12, 2020. Also on display through early January are a selection of permanent collection artwork from the Ozaukee Bank Gift to the Future Collection and other recent gifts as well as "Whimsical Houses of Ron Corlyn". Museum hours at the Wittenberg-Jochem mansion at N675 Washington Avenue are Wednesday through Saturday, 10am – 4pm, and Sunday, 12 – 4pm. For more information, visit www.cedarburgartmuseum.org, email info@cedarburgartmuseum.org, or call (262) 377-6123.

-Mary Chemotti
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