

Marine & Coastal Art 2026

Juror Statement

In judging this exhibition, I approached the work with the understanding that an art association show brings together artists working in different media, at different stages of artistic development and with different levels of experience. For that reason, I did not want the awards to become simply a comparison of technical skill or mastery of a particular medium.



Instead, I looked at each work as a whole. I considered the strength of the underlying idea, compositional decisions, use of color and value, handling of detail or simplicity and importantly, the emotional content and how successfully all of these elements come together.

Technical skill certainly matters, but for me, a successful work of art is more than a demonstration of technique. I am especially drawn to work that gives the viewer a reason to remain with it – to discover something beyond the first impression. A work may suggest a story, raise a question, create a mood, or offer a visual prompt that encourages us to explore it further.

I also wanted the awards to encourage artists to continue developing their work, to submit multiple pieces when possible and to challenge themselves in future exhibitions. An artist does not need to work in a particular medium or at a

particular level to create something compelling. What matters is how thoughtfully the artistic choices support the idea and the viewer's experience of the work.

There were also several digitally produced works that I found difficult to evaluate with confidence. In some cases, I could not determine from the information available how much of the final image resulted from the artist's direct creative process and how much may have involved generative AI or other digital tools. Because I wanted to judge all entries as fairly as possible, particularly in relation to works created directly by the artist from beginning to end, I chose to be cautious when considering these pieces for the highest awards. If this resulted in some digitally created work receiving less recognition than it might otherwise have deserved, I apologize. More information about the creative process would have helped me evaluate those works more accurately.

Ultimately, my selections reflect my own judgment as an artist and juror. Another juror might make different choices, and that is part of the nature of art. My hope is that these awards and comments encourage every participating artist to continue working, experimenting, submitting and developing an individual artistic voice.

1st Place: Maxwell Wiesen, *Two Strays*

This painting immediately suggests a story: a woman and her dog quietly looking toward the ocean, perhaps enjoying the moment or recalling memories connected to the sea. The simplicity of the composition, well-handled figures, and strong contrast create a convincing sense of a hot day, making the cool water beyond them feel especially inviting. It makes me want to be on that beach and, more importantly, makes me want to keep looking at the painting.

2nd Place: Jay Wilson, *International Yacht Restoration School, Newport, RI*

This photograph tells a human story without actually showing a person – the boat, tools and workspace make me wonder whether the maker has simply taken a break and what journey awaits the unfinished boat. I especially enjoy the contrast between the straight lines of the workbench, tools and shadows and the graceful curves of the boat, already suggesting the waves it has yet to touch. The carefully chosen angle, strong values and photographer's eye transform a working space into an image filled with craftsmanship and anticipation.

3rd place: Ruth Chapman, "ALOFT"

This small collage has a whimsical, almost illustrative quality that stayed in my mind and kept drawing me back to it. The nearly abstract arrangement of seagulls moving in different directions captures something very familiar about being by the ocean – their unpredictable presence above a beach or boat – while the unusual cropping and intimate scale make the composition especially effective. The careful selection and placement of textures and shapes reveal considerable thought and craftsmanship behind something that initially appears playful and simple.

Honorable Mention: Javier Eastman, *Breathe In*

This is a masterfully rendered painting with an astonishing level of realism, yet its greatest strength for me is the emotion it conveys. The restrained composition and natural gesture of the young girl suggest loneliness, disappointment, or perhaps the feeling of not being understood, creating an immediate sense of empathy in the viewer. Exceptional technical skill combined with this emotional presence makes the painting truly deserving of recognition.

Honorable Mention: Sean Murtha, *Long Rollers*

In strong contrast to the warm summer and coastal scenes throughout the exhibition, this painting takes us into the cold waters of the Arctic or Antarctic, where I can almost physically feel the heaviness of the water and the power of the waves. The clearing sky reveals an iceberg, while a narrow band of warm, sunlit horizon introduces hope and a sense of possible relief, suggesting that the danger may yet be avoided. Beyond its emotional impact, the work is beautifully executed and its strong compositional decisions make it an excellent example for other painters to study.

Honorable Mention: Susy Aubrey, *Sisters*

I enjoy the simplicity and almost collage-like quality of this large painting, where economical shapes and colors come together with a surprising sense of harmony. The two women seem to have interrupted their conversation only briefly to look toward the artist, giving the scene the spontaneity of a snapshot rather than a formal pose. The schematic reflections and simplified handling reinforce that immediacy, as though the painting captured just a few fleeting minutes before their conversation continued.

Honorable Mention: Joyce Grasso, *Exhale*

This painting has an almost abstract quality, built from broad horizontal areas of sky, cool water, and sand, with a simplicity that brings to mind the quiet power of a Rothko composition. The dark, heavy water and distant land are reduced to their essentials, while the foreground draws us onto the beach and creates the feeling of a quiet northern coast, perhaps somewhere in Maine. I especially value this kind of simplification – the ability to let go of unnecessary detail and paint almost as if from memory, preserving not everything one sees, but what one feels and remembers.

– Zufar Bikbov

*Zufar Bikbov is a painter and educator based in Watertown, CT. His works are widely represented in private collections throughout the United States – from New England to California – and abroad in the UK, Spain and Russia. Zufar has many followers of his art and considers teaching art a privilege. Learn more at **zufar.com**.*