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SHARING EXPERIENCES

By Christine Egnoski

Attending the annual conference provides artists an opportunity to network and exchange information and experiences. For many of our members that cannot attend the annual conference, we wanted to share the thoughts and practices from a few of our finalists this year. We hope you find inspiration, encouragement and perhaps some helpful advice in these words.

Louis Alvarez Roure was awarded the Draper Grand Prize, and when I asked him about competitions, he shared a unique perspective on how he treats them as a stimulant to keep his goals in check, challenge himself to raise the level of his work and to have his work seen by a wide range of people. Luis said, "I have been a finalist at many competitions throughout the years including some very prestigious ones like The Outwin Boochever Portrait Competition, and the Art Renewal Center. I was also twice selected as 'Select Fifty' in the Portrait Society of America's International Portrait Competition, but I never got to be among the finalists until this year. Since 2014 I've submitted work to the Portrait Society and something I never did was erase my rejection emails. I always took them with a level of disagreement at first, but most importantly I put a lot of attention and faith in the very last sentence that comes with the announcement which reads something like: 'even though your work was not accepted this year, we encourage you to take risks and enter competitions...' This, for me, served as a reminder of what it takes to be an artist of a high level and that if this were to be something easy, maybe it wouldn't be so unique and special. This particular phrase was fuel to my soul. I used it as a motivation to paint more and push for excellence. To my surprise, this year for the first time, I was a finalist, and to my delight I won the Draper Grand Prize, something I only dreamed of back in 2014 and because of it, became a reality. So, perseverance is undoubtedly a key to achieve our goals. Had I quit after my first or second rejection, I wouldn't be where I am today and closer to where I want to be tomorrow."

Mark Pugh was also a finalist this year and was awarded First Place Painting. I recently asked him about challenges he faced in establishing his art career and what advice he could share for an emerging artist. He was able to narrow it down to three items: "First, work hard to become as good as possible, and continue to improve your skills throughout your career. However, don't let it end there. Decide exactly how you want to use your skills to say something meaningful in your art. Second, paint for yourself. When getting feedback from



others, decide what advice works for your vision, decide how you want to utilize that advice, then forget the rest. Art is subjective, and you're going to get a lot of advice from people who think very differently than you. This can muddy the waters of your personal vision. Third, don't be afraid to experiment. Like my last bit of advice, there are lots of opinions out there about the do's and don'ts for painting. Just because one method works for another artist doesn't mean that same method is appropriate for you."

Kevin Chambers received First Place Sculpture for his piece entitled *Spiritus Invictus*. I asked him about the challenges he faced establishing himself as full-time artist. Kevin shared the following story: "Probably the hardest part of my career so far was deciding to leave my long-time apprenticeship, almost 10 years, and go out completely on our own. I say our because every part of this career I have had the support of my wife,