



SUSANNAH KELLY

ART AWARD EXHIBITION

By Liz Ohanesian

In late September 2024, Portland's Antler Gallery will present solo shows from the winners of the inaugural Susannah Kelly Art Award. Named in honor of the gallery's late co-owner, the awards recognize artists for their work in sculpture, illustration and painting. The 2024 winners, selected by a jury that included both Annie Owens and Attaboy of *Hi-Fructose*, are Spencer Tinkham (sculpture), Sienna Van Slooten (illustration), and Makoto Chi (painting).

"I found it intriguing that all three artists focus, to one degree or another, on the natural world," says Neil Perry, Kelly's husband and co-founder of Antler Gallery. "This has been part of the core identity of our gallery since Susannah and I founded it in 2012 and it feels very fitting for the inaugural year of these awards."

Antler is also holding the group exhibition, *Transmigrations*, which features winners of the Artist of Great Potential Award. "Looking at this group collectively, what excites me is the wide array of styles and media represented while satisfying an essential part of our curation—that each artist possesses excellent proficiency in executing their work," says Perry. "Each of them will contribute one piece to a group exhibition focused on the themes of rebirth, renewal, and the circle of life."

ABOVE: Sienna Van Slooten, "Crepuscular Species of the Sonoran Desert", graphite, watercolor and colored pencil on paper, 18" x 24", 2024

Spencer Tinkham

"My love for science sparked my love for art," says Spencer Tinkham. The Norfolk, Virginia-based sculptor meticulously carves animals from wood, in addition to making "macrosculptures" that zoom in on the details of features like feathers. "I am inspired by seemingly repetitive structures in nature at the macro level," says Tinkham. "I have noticed that butterfly wings look like fish scales, feathers resemble animal hair, and mammals appear similar to plants at different magnifications."

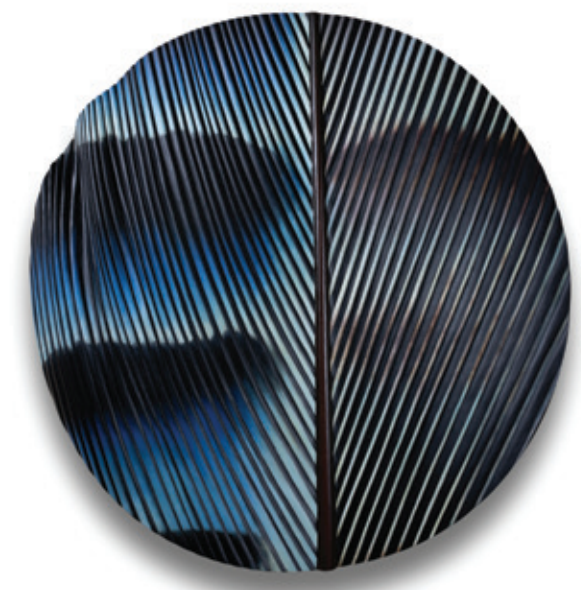
Tinkham was a child when he learned whittling from his grandfather. Later, as a teen volunteer for a nature conservancy, he made bird decoys, learning to capture personality in his sculpture while working with live subjects.

OPPOSITE: Spencer Tinkham, "Love Leads the Way", basswood, holly, brass, onyx jewelry beads, and oils, 36" x 10" x 4"





"I'VE BEEN PLAYING WITH DUALISMS, YIN/YANG, BIFURCATING, AND RE-KNITTING TOGETHER..."
—MAKOTO CHI



Science and nature continue to fuel Tinkham's art. He uses natural history museum databases for research. For his feather sculptures, Tinkham looks for birds with interesting stories and he'll photograph specimens at the museums for reference. Meanwhile, Tinkham's frog macrosculptures are inspired by ones that can be seen at zoos and those who live behind-the-scenes in breeding programs. On the back of the works, he illustrates specimen tags noting the specimen that inspired each piece. The scientific name of the specimen is used as the title of each work.

At Antler Gallery, Tinkham will show both frog and feather macrosculptures. In one piece, he combines a life-sized strawberry poison dart frog with a magnified quetzal feather. "This sculpture builds on the central theme of all of my macrosculptures," he says, "that we are all connected on a deep level, and there is more than meets the eye."

Sienna Van Slooten

"One of my primary artistic goals is a somewhat serious one—to bring more awareness to the growing impact that climate change is having on the planet's ecosystems," says Santa Fe-based Sienna Van Slooten, who merges realism and whimsy. "So it's important to me to also incorporate joy into my work, since that's the first feeling I often get when interacting with nature."

With a background in science illustration, Van Slooten looks at relationships between different species as she works. "Getting to witness these types of relationships firsthand is ideal," she says. "I love hiking and I try to collect as many of my own references as possible, but that's only helpful if I'm working on pieces that portray local ecosystems. When I'm working on pieces that portray species I don't have the opportunity to witness firsthand, I collect tons of online references, often from iNaturalist, and spend a lot of time combing through different science articles and papers."

For Antler Gallery, Van Slooten includes pieces from her series *The Rabbit and the Hare*. Two works focus on at-risk species, the pygmy rabbit and the New England

cottontail. Other works highlight the snowshoe hare and white-tailed jackrabbit—whose natural ability to camouflage themselves has diminished with earlier snowmelts—and the swamp rabbit, whose population can indicate the health of an ecosystem.

Van Slooten's largest piece for the show, "Crepuscular Species of the Sonoran Desert," is inspired by the southwest at dawn and dusk. "I really love that a whole host of species of both flora and fauna choose this fleeting time of day to emerge," says Van Slooten. "It makes it feel all the more special to witness a crepuscular species out in nature."

Makoto Chi

Based in Western Massachusetts, Makoto Chi has a multi-disciplinary practice that includes painting, illustration, tattoo, and 3-D art. "Fortunately and unfortunately, a short attention span sits in the driver's seat of my interests—staying with one practice gets boring so, paradoxically, I need a lot of options to stay focused," he says.

While Chi initially tried to keep these practices separate, that's no longer the case. "I am often juggling similar themes across different mediums: queer desire and sexuality, spiritual themes related to my Jewish and Japanese heritages, the way diasporic and transsexual longing crisscross and overlap, observations on conflict, intimacy; sometimes a place to put my ego-dystonic thoughts and feelings," he says. "Working in a lot of different mediums brings out different flavors of these themes, adding dimension and different perspectives—and helps keep things fresh and interesting for me, the person making the art."

Chi will be contributing large drawings and watercolor paintings to the Susannah Kelly Art Award Exhibition. "Thematically I've been playing with dualisms, yin/yan, bifurcating, and re-knitting together," he says. "I've been influenced by some Shinto and Buddhist imagery, and folk art from the Jewish diaspora; I've been thinking a lot about temples and sacred spaces and the kinds of art that adorn them, and the folk and mythological figures that I would love to see as spiritual guardians for my communities."✦

OPPOSITE: Makoto Chi, "Even If It Seems Certain That You Will Lose, Retaliate", ink, acrylic, and gouache on paper, 20" x 16", 2024

ABOVE: Spencer Tinkham, "Garrulus Glandarius (Eurasian Jay)", basswood and oils, 24" x 24" x 2"