

It seems especially appropriate that **Studio Montclair** chose the title “**ViewPoints**” for its *annual juried show*. This year’s exhibition—the organization’s nineteenth—showcases the diverse work and multiple viewpoints of ninety-eight artists from across the United States, Latvia, and Poland. Defined as a place of observation as well as an attitude of mind, “viewpoint” is a perfect word to identify what artists offer to us—their unique perspectives on the world and on the art making process. Artists situate their viewers at specific vantage points, enabling them to see through their eyes, even when their subjects are abstract. By switching up viewpoints, exploring different mediums and adopting distinctive styles, artists continually seek fresh ways of looking and seeing. While this show presents an enormous range of viewpoints, it also provides an opportunity to see some of the different ways artists handle similar themes.

Trees are especially popular subjects among this group of artists, prompting a diversity of artistic approaches. Linda Brooks Hirschman utilizes another organic material—wool felt—to stand in for tree bark in her innovative *Tree Skins: Chopped, Strangled, Burnt*. In a pair of related photographs Jane Soodalter zooms the viewpoint in to reveal the highly textured abstract patterns of tree bark. Jennifer Weigel’s photograph *Reaching for the Sky* presents a worm’s eye view of a tree, its limbs suggesting upstretched arms reaching toward a blue sky. These artists offer three different ways of seeing tree bark and explore its skin-like quality. Marcie Cooperman, Yvette Lucas and Nicholas Teetelli address the play of light and shadow on trees using techniques of watercolor, printmaking and photography.

Windows can offer viewpoints onto the world or reveal private interior spaces. In Bin Feng’s staged photograph *The American Dream – Oh Darling! It’s too distracting!*, light eerily streams through a kitchen window, exposing an enigmatic domestic scene. In Cary Africk’s *23rd Street Vendor*, art is seen on display through several gallery windows at night, while the glow of a food truck on the street below illuminates two figures. As in many of the photographic works in this exhibition, we see through the artist’s eyes and witness private moments of human interaction.

Two works featuring car windows offer profoundly different city views. **Pauline Chernichaw gives us a fleeting glimpse inside a yellow taxicab as it speeds by, carrying passengers who seem caught off guard by the photographer. The man gestures as if dodging the paparazzi and the woman’s face uncannily echoes the shaded gaze of Maleficent in the movie advertisement on the car’s roof.** In Allan Gorman’s painting, *Williamsburg Red*, the side of a parked car acts like a funhouse mirror, its window and glossy red finish reflecting a distorted view of the surrounding streetscape. Nathan Taves also uses distortion to great effect in his oil painting, *Two Views Passing*. Taves bends reality and melds several views together, approximating the experience of moving through a landscape with rapidly changing perspectives.

The representation of people attracts many artists in this exhibition. Interestingly, a few of them make portraits that obscure or alter parts of the subjects’ faces. Scott

Leahing's *I Am Not Invisible* portrays a veiled woman against a background of Asian-inspired characters. The size of the work and the inclusion of a postmark stamp suggest a postcard from an exotic place. Kate Shannon's *Untitled*, from her series *Within the Happy Crowd*, presents a surrealistic view of an isolated figure. Seen from below, the head is obscured, but a blue balloon is perfectly situated to replace the "missing" head. William Dean Reynolds' *trompe l'oeil* portrait of a mysterious Italian man includes an open book of matches fanned over his mouth. Stephanie Regen's digital transfer prints *Mara* and *Abe* appear to be somewhat degraded portraits of Abraham Lincoln and Marilyn Monroe, with cutout noses taped to their faces. Her title reveals that they are from the artist's "Oprah's Nose" project, which looks like an intriguing and unusual examination of celebrity culture. There is a similar lighthearted quirkiness in several other portraits. Carol Tanenbaum's photograph introduces an old Cuban woman wearing an exuberant hat of red flowers and smoking a cigar, and in Galina Dargery's mixed media work *The Gift*, a woman balances a cake on top of her head while contemplating the ingredients and elements needed to create a dessert.

Sometimes the artist's unique vision forces us to see things that may be slightly unsettling. Dana Flynt's moody, out-of-focus photograph *Fading Memories XI* shows us what memories look like to someone who is struggling to remember. Barbara Brill's *Recess* presents a bird's eye view of children playing ball. Their tiny figures moving on the playground look like stones skipping across the smooth surface of a pond, their shadows resembling ripples in the water.

Of course these limited observations cannot begin to cover the additional viewpoints expressed or address the wide range of abstract works in the show. But perhaps that is the point. One of the greatest benefits of experiencing an exhibition like *ViewPoints* is that faced with so many perspectives—aesthetic as well as conceptual—viewers are free to pick and choose what speaks loudest to them. And with so many possibilities they can continually refresh their own points of view.

Mary Birmingham
Curator, Visual Arts Center of New Jersey