

\$1500 Best in Show: Theresa Arico, Remember (31)



\$500 Honorable Mention: Nico Amortegui, El Jardin (7)

\$500 Honorable Mention: Brick Bordon, SEE (9)

\$500 Honorable Mention: Layne Sizemore, Heavy Like 2020 (11)



Statement by Jerstin Crosby
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This unforgettable year brought profound change to all aspects of our lives. At this moment, communities like our own continue to be devastated by the ongoing effects of the pandemic. After months of quarantine our attention pivoted sharply toward the reinvigorated civil rights movement that brought the call for racial justice to big cities and small town streets. The necessary policies to slow the spread of Covid-19 pulled us apart to be safer at home, and the ongoing struggle for civil rights brought us together to make our voices heard. Stately statues whose materiality long outlived their oppressive origins have finally been removed. Within this cultural context, and at a moment when we find ourselves in an increasingly polarized nation, we find ourselves thirsting for moments of healing.

Art has the power to heal. For many people, the effects of these cultural forces on art and artists is the least of their worries, but to those who find their purpose in the arts, the *Sculpture in the Garden* exhibition at the NC Botanical Garden is a welcome and much loved annual event. With many museums and galleries only just reopening after long closures, public and outdoor art has taken on a renewed and vital place of cultural significance. With that in mind, every work of art by every artist included in this year's exhibition deserves our deepest gratitude. Thank you artists. And thank you to the garden staff for the work in making this show possible.

From my perspective, it was important to frame the 'best of show' and 'honorable mention' choices within the cultural moment of 2020: art we won't soon forget in a year we can't forget. The four works chosen either directly or indirectly work within this context.

Best in Show:

In *Remember*, created by Chapel Hill-based artist Theresa Arico, we find echoes of Black Lives Matter through the feather symbolism and words by poet laureate Joy Harjo. The towering feather, which the artist reminds is a symbol of "trust, honor, strength, wisdom, power and freedom" is made of thousands of mosaic tiles. The fragments reflect our disjointed gaze back onto ourselves as we read "Remember you are All People and All People are you".

Honorable Mentions:

El Jardin, by Charlotte-based artist Nico Amortegui is a vibrant yet crudely formed totem figure. With his piece, Nico tells us the "story of the garden and land of my own backyard". I'm reminded of how many of us took refuge in our yards and neighborhoods during the early days of quarantine. We found new magic in the overlooked spaces we may have previously taken for granted.

While *El Jardin* speaks to our renewed appreciation for our immediate surroundings, another work titled *SEE*, by Durham-based artist Brick Bordon, tells us a bit more about our inner workings to process it all. They ask in their statement, "Is it birth, decay, building oneself, or tearing down?". This ceramic work begs us to carefully inspect it from every angle, inside and

out. Interiors merge with exteriors as openings within the body join together with architectural elements.

2020 is heavy, and *Heavy Like 2020* by Chapel Hill-based artist Layne Sizemore takes a calculated, minimalist approach to the weight of it all. Two closed columns lay on the garden path and carry the load of twenty neatly stacked painted bricks. It is a remarkably reserved and understated conceptual approach to express the calamity of our collective experience.

Despite all the heaviness, which Layne's piece counts out, we find vitality and light all around. We find it in the outdoors, the gardens, and our newly reexamined backyards, which we share with only our closest friends and family. The timing of this annual exhibition could not have been better. We were anxious for a destination, we needed clarity, reflection, inspiration and to smell the flowers. The 2020 *Sculpture in the Garden* show provided us with a safe path to experience art and a means for artists to discover new fans and needed support.