

Samples based on previous years' guidelines and materials, which are subject to change.



2020 Reference Guide

Twining Humber & SOLA Awards

Artists can use this reference guide to see how previous Twining Humber & SOLA recipients submitted successful written application materials.

Sample Application Materials

Artist Biography (150 words or less) tells your story as an artist. It provides details about you and your work, such as where you were born or grew up, your training, career development, accomplishments, or other information that may not be found elsewhere in the application.

Artist Statement (350 words or less) is an introduction to your work or a specific body of work. It gives an overview of its concepts, ideas, and themes. It may include information about how your work developed, why you have created it, your vision, influences, and inspirations, your philosophy of art-making, and other details that introduce your work. A strong artist statement is clear and specific, captures your speaking voice, and avoids clichés and jargon.

MalPina Chan (2019 SOLA recipient, Thurston County)

Artist Biography

MalPina Chan was born in California and received a BFA from Earlham College in Richmond, Indiana. She continued her studies in photography, printmaking, and book arts in the NW. MalPina was raised in a bilingual household and finds that ethnic identity among second generation Asian Americans is inevitably tied to the process of assimilation. She received 2012 GAP grant to support studies at Pilchuck Glass School. She was awarded an artist-in-residency at James & Janie Washington Foundation. MalPina's work was featured in the inaugural "INK THIS!" exhibition at Tacoma Art Museum. Her artist books are included in 500 Handmade Books Vol. 2 and 1000 Artist Books. MalPina's work can be found in public and private collections: the Cynthia Sears Collection - Bainbridge Island Museum of Art; the cities of Seattle, Tacoma, Portland; Harborview Hospital; UW Medical Center; the libraries of University of Washington, University of Puget Sound, Evergreen State College.

Artist Statement

The context of my work is woven together from my identity as an Asian American, a woman, and a mother. Recent events compel me to focus on the impact of external pressure on our minds and bodies. I am interested in cultural inheritance, cultural shifts, and societal pressures on personal culture. It is my exploration of social justice, history and current discourse that inspires my work. I want to question, investigate and generate a dialogue as I explore immigration, race, identity, diversity, inclusion, gender and equality in the context of history, our memories and today.

To tell the story of my family's immigrant experience in the early 1900s, I incorporate imagery drawn from a rich resource of old family photos, immigration documents, letters, and cultural icons. Critical immigration issues summon childhood memories of relatives who lived in fear of the government and deportation due to their "paper son" status. It is an agonizing existence that takes a toll on the families who are affected for generations.

Most of my life I have been asked the "WHAT are you?" and "WHERE are you from?" I would answer "I am an American" and "I am from California." The response would be "NO! Really.....WHAT are you? WHERE are you from?" Depending on the situation, I would find creative ways to answer these questions. I recall these exchanges with mixed emotions. I use this energy to make work telling the story of the immigrant experience, a story many immigrant families share regardless of their country of origin.

Critical to my practice is extensive research to inform the context and content of my work. In my current artist book series, I take a conceptual approach to challenge the preconceived idea of the "book." Recontextualized materials, objects, and text encourage "reading the book" from a new perspective.

In both my 2D and 3D work, I layer my visual vocabulary of images and text to bring light to how our lives and experiences overlap creating a narrative that connects us all at a human level telling our collective stories.

Mary Coss (2019 SOLA recipient, King County)

Artist Biography

Born in Detroit, I was raised in an environment of politics, creativity, and inquiry. These inform and form me and my practice. My mother is a quilter and a voracious reader, also reading tea leaves. This nurtured making things and a love of nuance, allusion, and metaphor. My dad was an unintentional Rube Goldberg style of creator from a long lineage of artists and an outspoken judge. His unrelenting questioning inspires my art, a practice centered in the critical social issues of our time.

I advocate for art and social justice. Mentorship of women, teaching underrepresented youth and elders and extensive travel contribute to my drive as a cultural worker. My passion for collaboration and community guides partnerships. I started a rape crisis center that flourishes after 30 years, a public art program teaching youth employable skills, METHOD Gallery, and I'm a cofounder of Borealis A Festival of Light.

Artist Statement

I'm an Interdisciplinary artist creating sculpture and installation. My work explores the human condition, personal and cultural identity. I am a storyteller, a witness, a cultural worker. I examine society from a poetic viewpoint. People's stories are my inspiration, allegory is my vocabulary. I use abstracted imagery not as representation, but as a place to start conversation, as a way to speak through metaphor. It signifies possibilities, fosters dialogue, creates distance from the built in narrative. The original meaning becomes a remnant, a vestige of itself. My work considers existential questions, explores perception, creates disruption. Thematically, I am interested in memory, time and life cycles, reflecting on the past, questioning the present, and challenging the future. Topically, I work with issues of social justice: gender politics, gun violence, threats to people and the environment.

I research, conduct interviews, collect artifacts, and sketch with pencil, wire or rod. My approach is gestural with evidence of the human hand. I experiment with building materials, mold-making, and all things three dimensional. Text is used as texture and content. I integrate visual and conceptual layers and weave imagery and philosophical threads into one. Navigating scale changes the relationship of the experience for the viewer, expands the human connection from familiar to ceremonious, intimate to uncomfortable. I use light, sound, and projection to deepen the subject matter and to create a visceral experience. This real and tactile understanding goes beyond universal truths and taps into personal experience. This is where my art lives.

Travel increases my cultural competence, feeds my visual vocabulary and exposes me to unfamiliar landscapes. I embrace collaboration, partner across disciplines, work with poets and scientists, and incorporate performance and interactivity to broaden viewer experience. My community engagement developed through teaching is mindful and built on cross-cultural sharing. My teaching and Public Art focus on underserved communities to use art to expand access and enrich experience. Established partnerships with non-profits and housing authorities support this. I am dedicated to an art of social justice that touches our souls and expands our capacity to grow and understand.

Sherry Markovitz (2019 Twining Humber recipient, King County)

Artist Biography

Sherry Markovitz was born in 1947, Chicago, Illinois. In 1969, she received her BA from the University of Wisconsin and moved to Seattle to attend the University of Washington, where she earned her MFA in 1975.

Markovitz's earliest works were paintings on large expanses of unstretched canvas, and smaller works on board, occasionally embellished with beads, string, ribbon or sequins. In the early 1980s, that decorative impulse led to a series of fully beaded animal heads. In the 1990s, Markovitz developed a series of wholly abstract works constructed from gourds or papier maché forms cast from yams, still beaded, but much more restrained otherwise. In 1999, Markovitz began a series of works on paper, created with various water-based paints on paper, very straightforwardly, with almost no embellishment. In the last few years, Markovitz has created a number of ephemeral gouache paintings on unstretched cotton cloth.

Artist Statement

The most important aspect of my work is that it's circular, not linear. I weave in and out of themes and materials, sometimes developing an idea with new materials and ideas. I move back and forth between two and three dimensions. The same symbols change their meaning over time; a symbol of loss in one body of work becoming one of well-being in another.

My earliest paintings are of domestic and confined animals such as sheep or donkeys speak of comfort and security, which correspond to the death of my father. Later I explored the wilderness arena with images of bears or deer animals that are often prey. The paintings moved into sculpture, as they couldn't be contained in two dimensions.

In 1981, I began a series of ornamented animal trophy heads of deer, elk and moose and wild cats. They are a feminization of the traditional male role as hunter, which has for centuries carried an unspoken taboo for women.

When my mother died in 1985, I returned home and began a series of doll paintings. With leftover pieces of metal, they spoke about loss and fragmentation.

The birth of my son in 1988 was a quiet, happy period. I began to do simplified shapes using beaded surfaces as monochromatic skins for gourds, accentuating their sensuous curves and contours. I see these gourd works having a spirit of gathering rather than hunting.

The previously two-dimensional dolls became sculptural in 1998, but I still needed multiple languages of materials and ideas. It was a way of expressing obsessive compulsion against quiet simplicity. When I look at what I have created I am able to understand what emotional and artistic obstacles I am working through. Recently I have been working on pieces that have interchangeable parts-parts that are constantly in flux. I think I am in a place in my life where I am able to accept a certain uncertainty and maintain as much freedom as possible in the future.

Marita Dingus (2018 Twining Humber recipient, King County)

Artist Biography

Marita Dingus was born and raised in Washington State. She continues to maintain her childhood home in Auburn where she raises goats, chickens, and two cats. Marita attended parochial school where the nuns encouraged her talents, using mimeographed copies of her drawings as images for her classmates to color. During high school, her brother-in-law questioned why she never drew Black people, awakening her self-consciousness. Marita attended Temple University and studied abroad in Rome, where she was exposed to ancient Roman and Renaissance art. After earning her BFA, Marita enrolled in a study abroad program in Morocco. This first-hand exposure to African art resulted in her changing from painting to sculpture. Marita travels whenever possible to Asia, Africa, Europe, and across North and South America, harvesting inspiration and ideas that can be incorporated into her art.

Artist Statement

I consider myself an African-American Feminist and environmental artist. As a child my father would bring his discarded engineering paper home from work so I could use the backsides for drawing paper. In a 1982 visit to a beach in Morocco, a nearby garbage dump with “rats as big as cats” caught my eye, leaving a deep emotional imprint about the vast waste humans produce. I’ve also come to the viewpoint that people of African descent were “used” during the institution of slavery and then callously discarded. So, I make art out of discarded materials to express an empowering message. The goal of my art remains to show how people not only survive but prosper under dire circumstances. From the foundation of my Afrocentricity, I shape my art and garments, using re-purposed fabric, leather, plastic, and other found objects to create eclectic and inspiring pieces to convey a powerful message about the sustainability of the human spirit.

Ann Leda Shapiro (2017 recipient, King County)

Artist Biography

Ann grew up in NYC, next door to the Museum of Natural History and across the park from the Metropolitan Museum of Art. She spent the sixties at art school in San Francisco, protested the Vietnam War, participated in consciousness raising groups and embraced feminism. As an academic vagabond (token woman) Ann has lived on a desert ranch in Arizona, a miner's cabin in the Colorado Mountains, and on a ship that sailed around the world for the semester-at-sea program. Ann volunteered at an AIDS clinic in Texas and was introduced to Chinese medicine. Inspired to research and illustrate Chinese medical history, she enrolled in acupuncture school, completed the program and drawings and became a certified acupuncturist. Ann has traveled extensively from Europe to Vietnam to Vashon Island where she has maintained an art studio in the shadow of Mount Rainier for the past twenty-five years.

Artist Statement

The intersection of art, science, medicine and politics is where my heart and art live. Years of making paintings and sculpture about death led me to the exploration of what is aliveness? To undertake this research I enrolled in acupuncture school to study the energetics of the body. I illustrated the history of Chinese medicine employing a graphic narrative style.

As an artist and acupuncturist I have a unique perspective. Through visual case studies, diagnostics, and x-ray vision I investigate layers of meaning. Taking the body apart and reconstructing it with elements of the night sky, water, and patterns from nature I reflect what is going on in our exterior world through the interior body as landscape. I am actively concerned with world events and our fragile environment. Combining psychological states and physical disorders I attempt to portray solutions and possibilities for healing the body and the planet.

Experimenting with materials and techniques, I combine watercolor and gouache for transparency and opacity and use cut paper to create forms and narratives that express difficult political and environmental issues. I draw inspiration from illustrated manuscripts, early renaissance predellas, and the traditional folk crafts of paper cutting, lace-making, and embroidery. For more than four decades my art practice has been primarily self-driven giving me the freedom to take risks.

Two of my early watercolor paintings have been acquired by the Seattle Art Museum for their permanent collection: "Two Sides of Self" and "One Needs a Cock to Get By." In 1972, these very "drawings" were censored by the Whitney Museum, anything limp was hung, anything erect was not.

At the time, I had no idea I was pushing boundaries and was probably in more shock than my critics. I was simply questioning what is male, what is female?

I continue to ask questions and with my current body of work "He She's" link back to early investigations of gender politics.

Barbara Earl Thomas (2016 recipient, King County)

Artist Biography

Barbara Earl Thomas has exhibited her art for more than 30 years, in exhibitions at prestigious institutions such as Seattle Art Museum, Tacoma Art Museum, and Meadows Museum of Art. Recent residencies include Pilchuck Glass School and Tacoma Glass Museum. In 2016, she is creating new art for a solo exhibition, Bainbridge Island Museum of Art, and a Sound Transit public-art commission. Her art is in important corporate collections, including Microsoft and Safeco. She holds an MFA, University of Washington. Her mentors were Michael Spafford and Jacob Lawrence. She is an author, invited to publish and lecture on many topics. Thomas is noted for a deep commitment to her community. While maintaining an active, successful art practice, Thomas was also administrator, fundraiser, advisor, and Director, Northwest African American Museum. In 2012, she left to focus on her art. She remains a NAAM advisor, as she creates the best art of her career.

Artist Statement

I am a visual artist, a storyteller in a grand narrative tradition, an author, and a committed community leader. I have created and publicly exhibited my art, to critical acclaim, since the early 1980s. My printmaking, drawing and painting have earned awards, commissions, residencies, and museum exhibitions. I developed a distinctive visual vocabulary and style early on: symbolic imagery; strong, clear, powerful line; dramatic tension; epic tales. My art has been compared to that of Jacob Lawrence, Guy Anderson, and William Blake – good company to be in, inspiring me to excel in my own unique ways, both like and unlike these artists.

It is the chaos of living and the grief of our time that compels me, philosophically, emotionally, and artistically. I am a witness and a chronicler: I create stories from the apocalypse we live in now and narrate how life goes on in midst of the chaos. A central question drives me: What is our responsibility as humans to each other, especially in times of tragedy, violence, death, natural or human disasters? I credit my Southern parents, who migrated to Washington pre-WWII, for my ability to tell a good story. Dramatic tension helps me draw viewers in, finding their own meanings and connections, as I reference the issues most pressing to our own time – from environmental harm, gun violence, or the continuing needless loss of our young Black men. Sometimes I leave a bit of a fairy tale, or a Bible story, entwined with a current event; all are, at their core, archetypal struggles of tragedy, humor, and violence of our everyday lives.

I am an active participant, mentor, and leader of my community, most visibly as Executive Director, Northwest African American Museum. In 2012, I stepped down from that role in order to fully focus on my art. For three decades, I have tried to express the universal experiences of how we live together and join in shared rituals of survival. I am an author, often called on to write about the work of other artists, in addition to writing my own original stories. In my new work, I fold fragments of my writing into my visual universe. My large-scale paper installations allow me to capture light and shadow that heightens the drama and impact of my allegories. I say with confidence that I am creating the very best work of my career, right now.