

## Undiscovered Artist contest winner humbled, happy with prize

By MICHELLE BURGESS  
FOR SUNDAY ARTS

No dangling chads or confused voters or conniving candidates slinging verbal darts at their fellow competitors were going to mar the Sunday Arts & Entertainment 2003 Undiscovered Artist contest.

The good news for all the artists was that they got along well, respected each other's work and each were happy to have made a connection with a gallery and to have gained exposure with Tribune readers.

The best news, though, could be delivered to only one worthy artist. At the end of the 10 weeks



"September 11"

of Sunday profiles and ArtWalk meet-and-greets and nine days of voting, it was acrylics painter Karen Leeds of Scottsdale who squeaked by her closest competitors to win a solo show at her host gallery and the title of Discovered Artist 2003.

All finalists worked hard with their assigned galleries to prepare their work for the show. Leeds had her work cut out for her when she found out she would be one of the final 10.

"I had submitted (my work) and let go of it," she says, "and when I got the news I was a finalist I was shocked. I was going through so many changes that coincided with the 10 weeks of the contest — I had just resigned from my job, was moving in with my fiancé, moving my studio. I got the call and panicked."

Leeds, the first artist profiled,

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JENNIFER GRIMES, TRIBUNE

**WINNER:** Karen Leeds of Scottsdale won our Undiscovered Artist contest.

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"Apache Trail Mountain," by Karen Leeds, the winner of the Tribune's Undiscovered Artist Contest

## WINNER: The contest was just as fun as the victory

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had four days to select the pieces she would prepare for hanging at Victoria Boyce Galleries as well as complete her interview and get photographed with her work. That sounds simple enough, but nearly all of Leeds' paintings were in transit or in storage or on loan. At the time, Leeds was trying to choose between two studio spaces.

Leeds came through. And even before learning she had won, she was glad she didn't let fear and panic overwhelm her.

"Everything went so fast," she says. "After allowing myself to just experience it, I started to come through the other side and I was so grateful just for the ability to

connect with Vickie (Boyce) and (gallery director) Torey Forga and the other competitors. It became less about a competition and more about the art."

She adds that "it was just such a boost to be a part of it, to know that I could say, 'I'm hanging in a gallery,' that I was getting that experience and credentials."

Many of her fellow competitors echoed Leeds' sentiments.

"I know this sounds kind of corny, but I feel, regardless of the outcome of the voting, that I have won the prize by having been given such a great opportunity to be represented by the Meyer Gallery," oil portraitist Julee Hutchison says. "I am hopeful that this contest opened a door for me there and that

our relationship will continue after the contest. For that I am very thankful."

Hutchison was one of the artists whose work Leeds says she really admires.

"I looked around at all the other artists and really admired their styles and skill level," says Leeds, who plans to continue with commissions and building a body of work. "I feel as an artist I have a lot of growing to do. I feel very humble. The fact that my work resonates with people is very humbling, very hard to describe.

"When I heard I won, there was a feeling of astonishment, then incredible excitement, panic, fear and the sense of 'Do I deserve all this attention?' After the chaos I've had, this is so rewarding."