

KATE WERBLE GALLERY

83 VANDAM STREET NEW YORK, NY 10013

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GIVING NEW ARTISTS A PLACE TO BE NOTICED

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WITH the expectation that international gallerists at the Armory Show in Manhattan this weekend may also want to head upriver, the Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art in Peekskill is presenting "First Look II," its second exhibition of works by jury-selected art students (the first was in March 2005).

Exhibitions of student works are not new — "Supersonic," in Los Angeles, the largest student-run show, exhibits 140 artists from nine West Coast schools — but First Look II is unusual in that it is independent of any school and has gone to great lengths to be more discerning. The invitation reads "16 students selected from over 800 studios — the best of the new artists in the U.S." An undisclosed jury consisting primarily of collectors and gallerists chose the exhibitors.

What has so far characterized the shows at the Hudson Valley Center is a strong taste for contemporary sculpture, and in First Look II, seven sculptors are represented. Their works range from storybook figures to a conceptual investigation of technology. David Mitchell, from New York University, presents a life-size wolf and a girl merging in "Kiss Kiss." Michael Brown, an undergraduate at SUNY New Paltz, reconfigures bits of Americana. A sculpture by Melissa Skluzacek of SUNY Purchase is activated by sound technology. **Gareth Long**, from Yale, uses voice-recognition to transform the conversations of gallery visitors into a live-action feed.

There is considerable diversity as well among the six painters represented. The small square black-and-white abstractions by Davis Rhodes of Columbia are a counterpoint to the paintings of dented and worn objects by Justin Allen of Hunter College. The two video artists also represent opposite poles of their practice. T. Marie Dudman, from Bard, digitally animates her "painting," and from Hunter College, Bryan Zanisnik films his grandmother with a rifle in her kitchen. And finally, there is one photographer represented: Sean Fader, from the Art Institute of Chicago, exhibits people in bed and down by the river from his "We Are Untitled" series.

Marc Straus, co-founder of the art center, knows the selection and promotion of such young artists will be met with mixed reviews. "Some people are going to hate this show," he said. "There is a real resentment toward the current art market, with the feeling that it is not in artists' and galleries' best interests to have this going on."

It is not just the youth of the artists that is notable, but the conditions of visibility that are being set for their work by a collector-run nonprofit.

What separates nonprofits like the Hudson Valley Center from museums and other nonprofit arts organizations are the speed and fluidity with which art crosses the boundaries between institution and marketplace. I have seen work removed from the floor of the center in the midst of an exhibition to appear in a major Chelsea gallery, and work on sale in galleries only months before it has appeared in Peekskill. ("Contemporary Sculpture: From a Private Collection" at Zwirner & Wirth in September was immediately recognizable to anyone who has visited the Hudson Valley Center as a sale from the Straus collection.)

In recent history, it was generally assumed that a nonprofit art space had distance from the market. Publicly financed alternative spaces like P.S.1 in Long Island City provided artists the space to exhibit compelling work without market pressure. Alanna Heiss, director of P.S.1, said that in the 1970s, "artists coming out of school never believed they could make a career of art —

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they didn't expect to live off it and never thought of living well.”

A textbook example of the difference in institutional approaches is the success of Tamy Ben-Tor, a video and performance artist at “First Look I.” Even though she was in P.S.1’s “Greater New York” at the same time, Ms. Ben-Tor said, it was her appearance at the Peekskill center that led to an invitation to the Performa05 event at Salon 94, followed by gallery representation and a rave review in *The Village Voice*.

Although affiliated with the Museum of Modern Art since 2000, P.S.1, Ms. Heiss explained, has “no collection and therefore no advantage in the market — P.S.1 thinks only of the viewer who comes through to experience art.” But she is also quick to say that any resentment toward supporting the work of young artists in the current market comes simply because “there is always resentment toward the next group of people.” Whether any artists exhibited at “First Look II” will be part of that group remains to be seen — but they are just a small part of the story.

Mark Coetzee, director of the Rubell Family Collection in Miami, one of the best-known collector-run nonprofit arts organizations, said the current expectation of the substantial collector in America is “not to be just an open checkbook for the museums, but to participate in a passionate engagement with the variety of discourses that establish community consensus.” That engagement, as Mr. Coetzee defined it, includes conversations in artists’ studios with other collectors, curators, critics, art historians and gallerists to substantiate the convictions of the collector in a world where the stakes are high.

It is in this mood that an increasing number of collector-run nonprofit arts organizations like the Hudson Valley Center have appeared, allowing collectors to bypass the curatorial system and have their say at a time when the art market is one of the largest remaining unregulated markets in the country and insider trading is the rule.

Ms. Heiss may be nostalgic for a time when it was possible for art to be free of market concerns — an ethical approach she calls the “ideological lodestone” of her profession — but she also enjoys the changes in the art world. As she puts it, “There’s real excitement that’s hard to duplicate except as some kind of strange sport.”

“First Look II,” Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art, 1701 Main Street, Peekskill; open Saturdays and Sundays, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Information at (914) 788-0100 or www.hvcca.com.

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