

ART

Works rejected by NEO Show disappointing in 2 exhibits

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The Cleveland Museum of Art's current NEO Show, a survey of works by artists from across the region, isn't the dynamic artistic experience it might have been.

Nevertheless, it's becoming clear that in choosing the 80 works for NEO from slides of more than 1,300 submitted by artists, the museum's jurors may have made the best selections available to them.

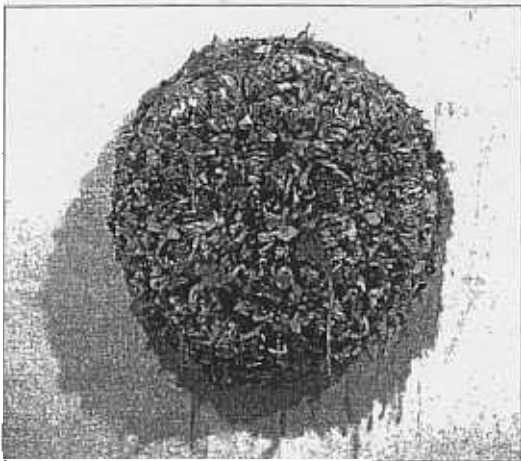
Proof, on a provisional basis, lies in a pair of local exhibitions, which have opened in response to the museum's show. In both cases, artists whose works were rejected by the NEO jury have placed their works on view in the alternative shows.

Both shows are also modeled on the originals' "Salon des Refuses" in Paris in 1893, in which the French government sponsored an alternative to the prestigious annual Salon exhibition at the Louvre, then criticized as being overly stuffy and conservative.

One, the "NEO + One" show, was organized by Ellen Rudolph for Murray Hill Galleries in Little Italy, where it's on view through Saturday, Sept. 3. The other is the "NEO Salon de Refuses" on the Web site of the Digital Museum of Modern Art, www.dmoma.org/lobby.html, a virtual showplace organized by W. Logan Fry.

Aside from the merits and demerits of both shows, the idea of offering feedback in response to the museum's exhibition is fantastic because comparing all three shows is an exercise in seeing. It's a way to start thinking about how the NEO jurors made their judgments and, in turn, for observers to examine their own personal judgments more closely.

For me, the works in the two alternative exhibitions generally



Michelle Droll's "Paint Wad" was rejected from the Cleveland Museum of Art's "NEO Show," but can be seen in "NEO + One" at Murray Hill Galleries.

REVIEW

"NEO + One" and "NEO Salon de Refuses"

doesn't have to meet the same high expectations.

Experimental works, like Michelle Droll's "Paint Wad," 2004, a giant ball of what looks like palette scrapings, is a flippant one-liner that makes sense in an offbeat gallery, although it might not hold up as well in a museum.

The same is true of Brooke Inman's "Ideal Friends," a cozy, carpeted living room, scaled for small children, which has been built behind one of the gallery walls and surfaced with cardboard and faux-primitive pencil sketches.

Michael Dickas' "Cat Tails," a grid of wooden coat racks arranged like an early Piet Mondrian gridded abstraction on a gallery wall, is another lighthearted gesture that's fun, even though it doesn't look quite ready for prime time.

On the other hand, the NEO + One show includes a few works by artists who are reaching for a greater sense of polish, but losing power as they do so.

One is Sarah McKenzie, whose tightly cropped aerial views of suburban houses under construction represent a concentration and simplification of a motif that

sardonic power they had when she focused on wider perspectives of suburbia. Her paintings are becoming more decorative and illustrational, as if they could be used in the annual report of a construction company.

David Bergholz, former director of the Gund Foundation, is displaying gridded compositions made with multiple Polaroid photographs of scenes from his home and garden. His work has the freshness of discovery, but it's becoming apparent that he needs greater control over the color in his pictures, which tends toward the amber palette of the Polaroid print film he's using. It also would be interesting to see him explore images beyond the security of his immediate surroundings.

In a similar vein, you have to wonder what might happen with the paintings of Taylor Dell, an artist drawn to nocturnal scenes of streetlights glinting off parked cars, ATM drive-throughs and fast-food restaurants. His brushwork is awkward and his palette is harsh without being distinctive. But he might be on to something.

The general sense of the show, then, is one of artists striving for growth and development. They were rejected from the museum's big NEO show, probably for good reasons. But much of the work contains a sense of in-

personal judgments more closely.

For me, the works in the two alternative exhibitions generally are less well-conceived, more experimental, less polished and less coherent. Some are also more conservative in sensibility, sweeter and more cloying in mood, more obvious in their emotionality. Many are more amateurish.

Whether this is true of all the works rejected by the NEO jurors is anybody's guess. The sample presented by the two shows is relatively small in relation to the total number of artists who tried to get their work into NEO.

Hard to judge works on a computer screen

The "NEO + One" show includes more than 40 works by 23 artists. The DMOMA show includes 53 works by the same number of artists, some of whom have also put works on view in "NEO + One."

Another caveat is that gazing at dozens of images on a computer screen is by a long shot not the best way to experience art.

The DMOMA online exhibition provides a modicum of visibility for the works on view, but it muffles any sense of scale, detail, surface texture, reflectivity, transparency or any of the other myriad physical qualities that make up a work of art.

That said, DMOMA's online "Salon" is an easy way to scan the work on view in a superficial way.

On that basis, it's easy to wonder why the NEO jurors rejected, for example, a large, vividly colored and vigorously painted image called "Untitled," by Jonathan Gott, which appears to show two large marionettes locked in combat. Here's one work, at least, that seems to deserve a closer look than is possible online.

Unfortunately, it's in the minority on the DMOMA site. Most of the show is full of saccharine landscapes, poorly drawn portraits or studies of the human figure and abstractions that are lightweight and flowery.

To be fair, some works might look more convincing in the flesh. But on the tube, they're not tremendously persuasive.

Artistic rebellion comes across forcefully

The "NEO + One" show is somewhat more rewarding because the idea of artistic rebellion comes across more forcefully in a real space than it does on the screen. Also, because the show doesn't bear the heavy burden of

tightly cropped aerial views of suburban houses under construction represent a concentration and simplification of a motif that has fascinated her for several years.

But by zooming in on the houses, and focusing so exclusively on the parallel striations created by wooden studs and joints without walls or floors, her paintings have lost some of the

growth and were rejection's big for good r the work c intriguing p experiments invigoratin turn out to To reach this slt@pland.c

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