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Domestic Images From Young Talent

By HOLLAND COTTER
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The "Artist in the Marketplace" program at the Bronx Museum of the Arts is one of the city's many under known resources. Now in its 16th year, it annually provides a crash course in career management for 36 emerging artists from the metropolitan area. And it culminates in a handsomely installed group show in one of the museum's galleries.

With three dozen diverse participants, the show can offer only the ghost of an overarching theme. And because some of the talent on view is still in formative stages, there are ups and downs. In some cases, the example of well-known artists and trends is a little too apparent; elsewhere, the influence of a shaping model would not come amiss.

Still, impressive artists have found an early legup here: Polly Apfelbaum, Byron Kim, Glenn Ligon, Ernesto Pujol, Danny Tisdale, Julie Trager and Lynne Yamamoto are all among the program's past graduates. And this year's exhibition, organized by Marysol Nieves and Lydia Yee, is full of promise.

Two characteristics mark the work as a whole: formal modesty (small scale, evanescent materials) and a preference for evocative metaphor over polemics. Domestic images recur: a walk-in tent stitched from striped bedsheets by Binda Colebrook is titled "Home Site"; a shrinelike wall sculpture by Omar Medrano, "House of My Life."

In general, the line between handicraft and art is blurred. Pamela Dewey's "Agenda" is a traditionally made pieced quilt but carries silkscreened images of pages from her engagement calendar. Robyn Love's miniature knitted underwear is both functional and sculptural. And Nancy Romines's ink drawings of knitted stitches on Mylar transfer handmade forms onto inorganic materials.

In several instances, paper takes over the role of cloth. Linda Liang's dresses are a smart answer to the fashion-as-art vogue: they're made entirely of paycheck stubs and charge card receipts. Catarina Leitao's opaque curtain of sheets of paper is light enough to sway with the slightest breeze, but each of its double-ply sheets holds the cast form of an everyday object -- a fork, a pair of baby's shoes -- sewn inside.

The pieces by Ms. Liang and Ms. Leitao qualify as sculptures, and even the show's more solid works in this medium have a vernacular touch. Both Audrey Stone and Anthony Fodero carve from household soap. (Mr. Fodero titles one of his text-based pieces "Absolution.") And Roxanne Wolanczyk has reconstituted a history of the female figure in art in the form of cookies.

The theme of domesticity, always symbolically loaded, even carries into the show's hit-and-miss selection of photography. It's there in Laura Larson's pensive shots of empty rooms in which costume dramas seem ready to unfold, and in Cary Kung's installation of family Polaroids.

The most ambitious photo work, though, is on a different track. Cristian Alexa's pictures of New York City's public sculptures include the familiar figures of Fiorello La Guardia, Gandhi and Columbia University's imperious "Alma Mater." But in every case, the artist has placed an alarm clock in the statue's hand, turning each figure into an emblem of time passing rather than of permanence.

Painting in the show also breaks into many directions. Sarah Leahy's lovely, blurry ink landscape on sanded Plexiglas has Gerhard Richter on its mind; Erika Rane's brushy abstraction peppered with demeaning cartoons of black faces lifts a page from Ellen Gallagher, and Agnes Martin appears to be the angel on the shoulder of Isabel Bigelow, who is represented here by four somber geometric pieces.

The question of influence is the very subject of work by two artists born into cultures that prize creative emulation. Juri Kim, from Korea, dramatizes the gestural impulse in ink painting by leaving the dragged impression of her hands on the paper. And the vertical acrylic paintings of Taipei-born Ling Wang explore the decorative possibilities of the traditional Chinese landscape.

Even a decade ago, one would have been surprised to come upon Chinese-style landscapes, not to mention Latin American religious forms (Mr. Medrano) and Indian goddesses (Ms. Wolanczyk) in a New York museum show of contemporary artists. Or to find a show in which two-thirds of the participants were women, and nearly half were foreign-born. But those are the noteworthy demographics of this year's "Artist in the Marketplace" exhibition. They not only reflect the diversity of the Bronx Museum's home borough, but also the cultural currents that have been slowly but surely reconfiguring American art throughout the decade.

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