

ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

A Show of Small Works, and a Group Sampler

At Two Venues, Exhibitions That Create a Magical Feel

By BENJAMIN GENOCCHIO

The Newark art scene could use more wealthy patrons, and City Without Walls is one place where they would come in handy.

The 32-year-old nonprofit gallery, which supports emerging artists and runs education programs on contemporary art, is one of the most socially engaged and dynamic art spaces in the state. It operates on a shoestring budget of \$253,000, made up of donations from members, foundations and government agencies. With more resources, it could do even greater things for the city and for contemporary art in New Jersey.

Part of the gallery's broader mission is to connect art and artists with the public throughout the state. It does that each year with its annual Metro show, this year celebrating its 25th anniversary. It is a juried, traveling exhibition featuring nearly 70 small works by artists mainly from New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania. The name of the exhibition refers to a tradition of transporting the works by train to places in New Jersey and New York. Artworks in the exhibition must be smaller than 13 inches in every dimension — length, width and depth. Making art this size is trickier than it sounds, for it forces artists to be extremely economical with their ideas and materials.

Many of the pieces here are skillful and clever. A few are fabulous, combining interesting subject matter and independent thought. Beth Gilfilen's intricate color-coded collage made of paint swatches from the hardware store is especially impressive; Marco Muñoz's ethereal still-life photographs from paper negatives are also lovely.

"Metro 25," City Without Walls, 6 Crawford Street, Newark, through Dec. 20. Information: (973) 622-1188 or www.city-withoutwalls.com.

"Sanctuary," Rupert Ravens Contemporary, 85 Market Street, Newark, through Jan. 18. Information: (973) 353-0110 or www.rupertravens.net.



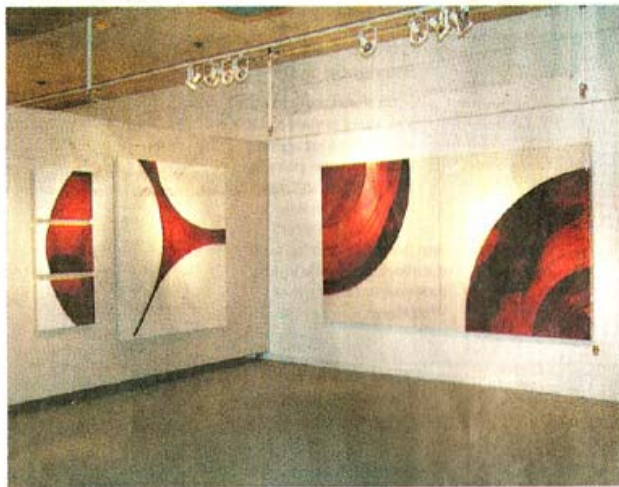
There are a handful of standouts among the many paintings. Joe Waks hunts down amateur landscape paintings in thrift stores, junk shops and yard sales, then paints McDonald's restaurant signs into them. Finally, he stamps them with his name, claiming them as his own. The paintings are hideous, but the idea is genuinely intriguing.

Amy Hill does oil portraits of urban hipsters in Renaissance style. They are creepy, the figures tough and tattooed, standing in front of brick tenements with the rolling hills of Tuscany in the background. They are like a George

Tice photograph crossed with a Piero della Francesca painting. They have a magical feel about them.

Magic also comes to mind across town at Rupert Ravens Contemporary, Newark's newest major commercial gallery. The space immediately blows you away — an astonishing 30,000 square feet running over three levels of an old discount furniture warehouse on Market Street. That is about double the gallery space in the New Museum of Contemporary Art that opened in New York in early December.

Notwithstanding the intense smell of



INTRIGUING

Above, from left, "Phase," "Signs" and "Phase 3-4" cow's-blood paintings preserved in resin (2007) by Jordan Eagles, at Rupert Ravens Contemporary. Left, "Zoe," oil on wood, by Amy Hill, at City Without Walls.

for his enterprising curatorial projects — is financing the gallery himself and needs to sell artwork to survive. (Here, too, those well-heeled patrons would be useful.)

For the moment, at least, Mr. Ravens is doing his best to attract a broad clientele: his inaugural exhibition, "Sanctuary," is a madcap group sampler of more than 150 works by 71 artists. The show is unfocused, though some sense of order is provided by the nine-page room sheet.

Among the works, all for sale, are minor pieces by the collectible artists Elizabeth Murray, Fred Wilson, Tara Donovan and Vija Celmins, as well as surprises by many who are less well known. (Most of the artists are from New Jersey, with a few from New York and elsewhere.) I liked a series of cow's-blood paintings preserved in resin by Jordan Eagles, which are so mysteriously beautiful they look like photographs. If Mr. Ravens keeps showing great new work like this, one has to hope he is here to stay.

A few well-heeled patrons could help art spaces to thrive.

mold mixed with mildew from a plumbing mishap — something has to be done about the problem — this is a great new initiative for Newark. How long it will last is anyone's guess, for Mr. Ravens — well known in the local arts community