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ART REVIEW; For the Young and Creative, a Showcase for a First Run

By BENJAMIN GENOCCHIO

MOST artists exhibit too young, and too often, a problem worsened to some extent by well-intentioned exhibitions like "First Look," at the Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art in Peekskill, N.Y. The exhibition showcases 15 artists enrolled in Master of Fine Arts programs in Westchester, Connecticut and beyond.

Then again, if the artwork can pass muster, why not give the youngsters a run?

But part of the meaning of making art for exhibition and sale, as a professional, is owning the experience that allows you to know what you are doing. Few emerging artists have that quality.

It's not wholly the artists' fault. Youth is in vogue at the moment, and our galleries and art museums can't get enough art-school innocents to fill their spaces. Even the art fairs are awash with the stuff. Investor-collectors, hungrily looking for the next new thing, aren't too far behind, seeing speculation on young artists as an extension of the stock market.

So who, from this current crop, selected by committee from 500 students in nearly 25 art programs -- most in the tristate area but also ranging as far away as Los Angeles -- is the new Andy Warhol? This is a silly question, for the real challenge facing these kids is simply surviving out there as an artist. My bet is that fewer than half of them will still be making art in 10 or 15 years.

But let's get back to the art itself. The first thing to be said is how much of it looks like the work of others. This is a perennial problem for art students. It's why they should be older when they show.

But there are one or two who seem further along the path of time, trial and error than others. That is not to say their work is better, or that they will have greater success, but rather that right now they seem to have more of a sense of direction. This is an important step, for it suggests that they are beginning to define themselves.

Painting is a crowded medium these days, with artists competing not only against living artists but also against the work of legions of dead ones. The trick is to have an edge or mark of some kind, to do something with materials, subject matter or visual signs that makes it your own, something that everyone will recognize and identify with you.

None of the many painters here really have that yet, although there are traces of it in individual works by Miki Carmi and Francesca DiMattio, both of whose work impressed me greatly. Kimi Weart is also an artist to watch out for; her graphite-and-glitter-on-paper drawings have an elegant way of saying serious things. Her works could easily be exhibited and sold in New York.

Much of the other drawing, painting and sculpture here is too effete. Being pretty isn't good enough; it

also has to make viewers think a bit. Nudging in this direction though, and thus worth mentioning, are works by Andrea Gaydos Landau (sculptor), Skyler Brickley (painter), Cal Lane (sculptor/installation artist) and Allison Gildersleeve (painter).

Beyond traditional media, the video artist Tamy Ben-Tor (who, by the way, is also in "Greater New York 2005," the orgy of emerging artist talent at P.S.1 in Long Island City) makes recklessly irreverent videos in which she pretends to be Hitler, his sisters or various women talking about him. The videos are captivating, I think, largely because you are not quite sure if the artist knows exactly what she is doing.

Nearby, Greg Smith has a grunge installation with a video component. It is ambitious, and fun -- especially the video that shows the artist foraging in the woods and assembling toys, widgets and whatever from found materials. The best part: he leans down at one point to the camera and says with attitude to the viewer, "You know what your problem is, you don't respect me."

Perhaps he's right.

"First Look," Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art, 1701 Main Street, Peekskill, through January 2006.