

*"DAG Annual Members' Show 2010," Durham Art Guild by Blue Greenberg
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Every year about this time, the Durham Art Guild organizes a non-juried show for its members who are encouraged to submit one work of art which will be displayed on the gallery walls for at least a month.

In most years, the work is quite good and the artists seem to have carefully judged their entries, scrutinizing them with self critical objectivity. This year, however, is a disappointment. Much of the work appears to belong to beginners and if that is so, the experienced artists will not enter another one of these exhibitions. It does their reputation no good to hang their work with rank amateurs.

In the gallery guide, Taj Forer, guild director, wrote that the exhibition offers "artists of all levels and backgrounds an opportunity to display their work in a non-competitive, professional environment." He also thanks the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants for supporting junior memberships and writes that the work of these "junior members has been integrated throughout the exhibit."

The guild is to be congratulated on this democratic process; it, however, does not work in a professional atmosphere.

The question centers on the benefits of a non-juried exhibition for the professional as well as the beginner. In my opinion, it does not enhance the resumé of the professional and it does not teach the student anything.

One solution would be to eliminate this event and to offer the students a critique from an outside professional. The guild's board needs to rethink this exercise because as it now stands the professional reputation of the guild is being weakened.

With that said I began to walk through the galleries wondering if the one piece from each artist represented the best single object from the past year or whether it was a culmination of an ongoing search into a new theme or new technique. Following that line I have picked a number of artists whose work I would like to see in some depth. It is a sure fire-way to tell if an artist has staying power; one piece tells us nothing.

Looking at the artists who work three dimensionally, I have focused on a few whose work invites further investigation. They include P. Hoffman, who smothered his stoneware bird in red feathers; Art Knowles, who created "9-11," a wall relief made of wood scraps; Kathy Hopwood's abstract sculptural doll; Jacquelyn Nouveau's "Crusader" made of drift

wood and fiber; Laura Farrow's well endowed rhino; and potter Kitty Sherwin, who decorated her traditional pot, "Memories," with children in relief and lined its interior with a high fired blue glaze.

Among the painters who promise more are Eleanor Edwards-Smith with her "Just Touching," a portrait of a small child gently picking her way through the grass; Roberta Wallace's mirror images; Maggie Lutz' "Man's Best Friend," a non-cutesy dog picture; Lori White's oil, "Moonset on Atlantic Beach," with its gentle waves undulating under soft white caps; and Murray Handler's strong black-and-white abstract with its slabs of tin foil. I have seen a number of Handler's paintings and he is ready for a Guild solo show.

And then there is "Bull City" by the team, Jacob Streilein and Chris Alton. This pastiche of Durham is a large acrylic where a giant child-like Gulliver plays with a music box, a paint can and an open sketch book. Is this a one-time collaboration or can this team produce more fascinating combinations?

Finally, there are a couple of outstanding photographs that make me want to see more. One is Eric Saunders' "Canyon Light" where an ethereal shaft of light cuts through a rocky boulder. The question, of course, hovers. Is this an accident or is Saunders, like Ansel Adams, a patient photographer who finds exactly the right moment? Peter Filene's "Winter and Spring, Central Park," is a double exposure and combines a fictional moment in a beautiful juxtaposition.

There is no question that the Durham Art Guild membership includes the best artists in the area. They have been buried, however, in this non-juried event.

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