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Art In Review

'Artist in the Marketplace'

By Holland Cotter

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'Artist in the Marketplace'
Bronx Museum of the Arts
1040 Grand Concourse, at 165th Street
Morrisania
Through Oct. 13

The finishing school known as the Artist in the Marketplace program at the Bronx Museum of the Arts isn't about good manners. It's a crash course in career survival techniques. These include tips on how to scope out galleries, how to approach them once you've done so and how to protect your legal rights and peace of mind in what has to be one of the more ego-challenging professions around.

And what larger benefits do the participants gain from 12 weeks of listening, talking and working? Maybe a little more confidence and street savvy and, for sure, a museum show.

The 36 artists in the 2001-2 exhibition, the 22nd annual, hail from Europe, Asia and across the United States, though almost all now live in New York. Together they give a fair sense of today's room-for-everyone art world. As always, there's plenty of well-made painting, drawing and sculpture. And the tone of the painting is often politically of psychologically fraught.

In a photo-realist picture by Fritz Chesnut, ardent rock fans seem to be panicked rather than joyous. Jonathan Allen's camouflage-pattern paintings are sprinkled with images of detached grasping hands. The bubblelike forms that Carl Eckhoff paints on children's printed bed sheets seem to be metastasizing ominously. Miguel Luciano's reinvented versions of produce-crate labels are vivid emblems of colonialist deprecation. (Mr. Luciano's work also appeared at Taller Boricua in Manhattan last season.)

As for drawing, it's done with traditional pencil on paper in Ulrike Heydenreich's sketches of furniture, and with thread and shadows in an almost invisible wall installation by Gema Alava-Crisostomo. It becomes architectural in Jeff Konigsberg's fractal-looking diagrams made of pencil, paint and carved sheetrock.

Architecture itself becomes a primary subject in Erik Benson's urban landscapes, collaged from line-thin strips of dried acrylic; in Geraldine Lau's aerial view of Yankee Stadium, made from bits of colored adhesive tape; and in Micki Watanabe's meticulously constructed tabletop models of library rooms.

In these works, an incremental aesthetic — one of piecing together and building up — prevails, as it does through much of the show. It's the formal impulse behind James Cullinane's wall drawings shaped from push-pins; Jose Enrique Krapp's assemblage of ladders, cables and first-aid kits (an exhibition highlight); Nelson Santos' multimedia disco room; Rajkamal Kaur Kahlon's interactive installation of paintings and mirrors; David Coggins' photographic documents of a month of peripatetic sleeping (a different bed every night); and Swati Khurana's delightful, wry three-channel video in which the artist appears as bride, model and exotic dancer.

Even apparently seamless work turns out to be a sum of discrete parts. Adam Henry's wild, illogical photographic perspectives of super-highways, for example, are montaged images from old magazines. In a sound piece by Alice Wu, a chamber-music performance seems to be accompanied by empathetic weeping, which is actually a recording of the artist's labored breathing during a workout. Sharon Paz's self-portrait sculpture, uncannily lifelike, is in two parts: the figure leans against a wall as if playing hide-and-seek, while her outstretched hand, holding an apple, appears on the wall's opposite side.

In short, there's a lot going on here. Some of the work is polished, some of it is still in formation: some will undergo major development, some won't. In any event, the museum and the exhibition's curators, Lydia Yee and Edwin Ramoran, have given the artists the means to put their best collective foot forward. In recent years, the show was often confined to a smallish space; this time, it has the full run of the two main galleries and looks terrific: airy, serious, museum-quality. The artists must be thrilled.