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ART IN REVIEW; 'Session the Bowl'

By Holland Cotter

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New art in New York this year looks different than new art did a year ago. You might attribute this to the sudden glut of painting, which, though assiduously promoted, has actually brought little news. What has shown up is, by and large, familiar stuff: catchy, well-schooled, but a bore. More stimulating is a variety of work, much of it by quite young artists, that includes painting but mixed with other media and in ways that confound standard notions of technical skill.

In such work, sculpture, painting, digital design, architecture, even knitting and music, coexist, often in total-environment combinations. Content is 1960-ish Pop intensive, and encompasses hip-hop, television, fashion, cartoons, psychedelia, pornography and video games, as well as rave, geek and skateboard culture. Maybe because of this mix-mentality, the most intriguing exhibitions tend to be group shows, like Scott Hug's environment at John Connelly Presents, or solos that feel like group shows. At their best, the results achieve a kind of slacker finesse: earnest, anarchic, exquisite.

"Session the Bowl," at Deitch's hangarlike Wooster Street space, gets at some of all this, though in an inorganic, neatened up way. The show revolves around a single environmental piece that is also a functional sculpture: an enormous wooden skateboard bowl called Free Basin, designed and built by the architectural collective Simparch and recently seen at Documenta. It is impressive and, when I visited, in enthusiastic use.

Installed around it is work by about 30 artists, much of it emerging from, or referring to youth and street culture, and specifically skateboard culture, which carries its own antiestablishment élan. Graffiti is part of its aesthetic, embodied here in work by Thomas Campbell, Doze, Futura, Todd James and Barry McGee. Cartoon animation has a big influence, evident in pieces by KAWS, Dalek and RoStarr, the last with the show's only abstract painting, which is pink and silver, and pretty.

As for Pop Art, Andy Warhol's spirit lives on in Shepard Fairey's stenciled portraits of Johnny Rotten and Richard M. Nixon, and in Ry Fyan's "Lipstick Astrology," a mural-like sheet of 80 magazine covers painted purple. Both artists are interesting figures, but as with almost everyone else, their impact is neutralized by the gallery's clean, formalist installation. Only Tony Cox's manic ensemble of thread-and-wood paintings, a wallful of drawings by Daniel Joseph, and Ed Templeton's funky arrangement of paintings and photographs suggest the all-over energy of Mr. Hug's show, which really feels like a newer version of new. HOLLAND COTTER

Photo: Awesome, dude! Free Basin, a wooden sculpture suitable for skateboarding, is part of "Session the Bowl," an exhibition at Deitch Projects in SoHo. (Deitch Projects)