

## ART IN REVIEW

**'Neo'**

Exit Art/The First World  
548 Broadway, between Prince and  
Spring Streets  
SoHo

Through Aug. 19

"Neo" is exactly what you want in an exhibition of young or underexposed artists: it is bursting with imaginative energy and reckless ambition. Don't look here for subtle refinement; Jeanette Ingberman and Papo Colo, the curators and the proprietors of Exit Art, have erred on the side of sensational and surrealistic excess. You get that right at the start of the show, where Eung Ho Park has suspended from the ceiling a towering three-dimensional grid of chained-together bowling balls.

Not necessarily the best, but epitomizing the spirit of the show, is a huge sculpture made collaboratively by Anna Ehram and Hilary Koob-Sassen. Stretched out in the air within a 20-foot framework of steel I-beams is a multimedia assemblage of bewildering complexity; it might be an insectoid monster giving explosive birth at one end to a heroic woman. At once sophomoric and visionary, this piece suggests the artists could have a future designing sets for science fiction movies.

The sculpture of Scott Reynolds is more convincingly focused in its use of neatly built wood grids that call Sol LeWitt to mind. Yet far from Minimalist sobriety, Mr. Reynolds's work is animated by an antic, hyper-intellectual wit. A pyramidal wall-hung structure containing an inflated and illuminated white balloon with a pair of teatlike elements protruding at the front is titled "A Re-creation of the Custom Window Treatments at the Freud Institute for Architectural Research."

Painting as plain old flat painting is entirely absent, but several artists offer dimensionally enhanced pictorial works. Michael Zansky aggressively gouges big, heavy wood panels to create violent, semi-abstract images of gnarly branch forms and crisscrossing beams against silvery blue skies. Han Sam Son accumulated and distressed with a knife great quantities of corrugated cardboard to produce a wall that is like the bark surface of an enormous tree. Marked by high-tech smoothness, on the other hand, Peter Coe's triptych of white panels with raised cellular forms and design elements neatly painted in color exude a trippy retrofuturism. Video and computer art are scarce, but Elka Krajewska's odd little movies seen through a

crude viewing tube attached to a laptop are interesting, and the computer program in Yucef Merhi's "Poetic Clock" generates better LED screen poetry than does Jenny Holzer.

Other works of note include David Henderson's swelling topographies in laminated wood; Francis Palazzolo's "Modern-Postmodern Proposition," which allegorizes the society of the spectacle as a ramshackle aluminum projection machine on wheels; a giant foot turned into a miniature snowy mountainscape by David Opdyke; and an installation by Woo Song Bang that fills its space with peanut shell clusters hanging above miniature, illuminated igloos that are surrounded by fields of salt. What the latter work means is anyone's guess, but like much else in the show, it gives the wildly improbable a richly palpable presence.

KEN JOHNSON

### Betsabée Romero Valdirlei Dias Nunes

Ramis Barquet  
41 East 57th Street  
Manhattan  
Through Sept. 2

Betsabée Romero is into cars. An interesting but somewhat unfocused appropriator born in Mexico in 1963, she mixes folk, Pop and modernist elements. In her first New York solo show, she presents religious narratives painted on automobile hoods and a wall-scale composition of emblematic canvases arranged in a grid matching that of downtown Mexico City with little toy cars running in the lanes between pictures.

Ms. Romero's most persuasive works, however, are sculptural. One is a funky, reconstructed vintage Volkswagen with parts of its body replaced by straw, corrugated plastic roofing or wood paneling. Thus the "Beetle," one of Mexico's most popular cars, is transformed from a piece of modern machinery to a work of folk assemblage. "Underground," a part-Minimalist, part-Surrealist installation, has the shape of a car roof pushing up under a gallery floor completely covered in wood veneer. This deadpan Magritte-style work looks as if it might be headed in a good direction.

In this gallery's small viewing room, Valdirlei Dias Nunes, a Brazilian painter, is also having a first New York show. Mr. Nunes is not a bit unfocused in his exploration of illusionism and geometric abstrac-



EXIT ART

Eung Ho Park's 1999 "Bowling Ball Curtain" in the "Neo" show.

tion. Each of his white, breadbox-size canvases bears a variation of a boxy, imaginary Minimalist structure rising up from the picture's lower edge. Painted with deft trompe l'oeil realism, permutations of wood-grained slabs and slender sticks generate a modest yet complex, and oddly mysterious, playfulness.

KEN JOHNSON

### 'Bubbles 'n' Boxes 'n' Beyond'

Swiss Institute  
495 Broadway, between Spring and  
Broom Streets  
SoHo  
Through Aug. 19

The comic book as serious entertainment — as art, even — has its passionate devotees. Yet it remains a problematic form that rarely rivals good fiction or film for narrative richness.

That said, this exhibition of 14 comic book artists from the United States, Canada and Switzerland is terrific. Paradoxically, the show works because it is more than just an exhibition of comic books. At stages within a long, maze-like corridor walled in by suspended plastic

panels, each artist has provided her own solo installation for their ideas, in most cases three dimensions.

In the first room, Thom Daniel Affolter has provided loving detail the wonder of a dark and claustrophobic space of a fictive aging mafioso. Ott's gothic, scratchboard portraits of family members adorning the walls. In the next space, French presents a series of rarely framed, postcard-sized traits of bizarre imaginary characters, like a mush-headed man in a paisley sweater, rendered with exquisite refinement.

Highlights along the way include the work of Kevin Pyle, who makes aggressive, ribald character studies on sheets of graph paper; David Zuchelli, whose clean, multi-page stories tell the story of a man's obsessive mission to eradicate hair; Kevin Pyle, whose drawings of secret government programs are the show's most politically efforts; and Claus, who draws and writes adolescent narratives with touching simplicity. All of these not rescue the comic book from its juvenile associations, but they make a persuasive case for the medium's rich, maybe limitless potential.

KEN J

### 'Imaging African Art' 'Documentation and Transformation'

Yale University Art Gallery  
1111 Chapel Street, at York  
New Haven  
Through Sunday

"Imaging African Art" is a play of 43 works, most of them graphic. It deals with the work of African Americans, black and white, who responded to the African American Early photographs of sculpture by Charles Sheeler. Walker Evans show its influence on European Modernism, which in turn influenced printmaking were used by Wilmer Jennings. Lois Maillou Jones in the reach back to their African roots.

Romare Bearden even melded European and African influences on the live-action Americans in a 1964 collage. Present-day contributions by Mae Weems documents the dungeons on