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Beaux arts views First Colorado Biennial

Juried art exhibits challenged

By Duncan Pollock

Rocky Mountain News Fine Arts Critic

ENTHUSIASM was sky high among members of the art community who turned out in record, elbow-to-elbow numbers the other evening to attend the opening of the Denver Art Museum's First Colorado Biennial.

This inaugural exhibition is a juried affair, open to all Colorado artists, craftsmen and photographers who care to submit work in many different media.

Juror Alfred Frankenstein, a noted art historian and art critic for the San Francisco Chronicle, performed the Herculean task of winnowing 1,700 entries to 208 in one weekend. While a few artists have more than one piece in the show, none of the 181 represented was permitted more than two entries.

Of course, there's enormous diversity to the Biennial.

Representational work

Artists hail from Aurora and Red Wing, from Pueblo to Parker. They practice flower painting, regional style scene painting, landscape painting and figure painting. Their work is representational and includes a few pictures with surrealist overtones and a few examples of the "new" realism. A good deal of work is abstract, conveying affinities with minimal, op and abstract expressionism.

Among the best entries are paintings by John Fudge, George Woodman, Robert Race, Connie Smith, Helen Barchilon and Patsy Krebs.

The Biennial is also hosting a large selection of prints and drawings, including work by Brent Warren, two fine examples of Jean Schiff's satirical talent and an unusually large number of formal sketches which veer a little too close for comfort to the celebrated preoccupations of Messers. Wiley and Reiss. Not surprisingly, the three artists in question are from Boulder.

With a few exceptions, the collages and mixed media work is mixed at the very best.

To continue the tour, sculpture entries include pop, figurative work, a few of the vanguardist, conceptual notions and some that are geometrically cut out of the welded steel schools of David Smith and Alexander Lieberman. Standouts in this area are pieces by Larry Marcell, Andy Libertone, Robert Ohman, an intricate optical light box by John Andrikopoulos and wholly different works by Bill Shirley and Gary Mauro which nonetheless both combine elements of painting and sculpture.