

INSIDE	
Movie directory	E3
Arts calendar	E4
Travel	E6

Arts

E

NEW HAVEN REGISTER

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Ely House works contemplate issues and aesthetics

By Judy Birke

NEW HAVEN — The primary connection among the inclusions in the 2006 Invitational at the John Slade Ely House is that the gallery's curator, Paul Clabby, thinks highly of each artist's work and felt it was time to offer a fresh mix of works by regional artists who haven't been showcased in a major exhibit at the venue this season.

Why not? The gallery space is large and accommodating, quite capable of accepting the differences in style, medium and influence that are bound to occur in this type of presentation.

In fact, the show turns out to be a well-chosen distillation of close to 50 pieces by 19 artists, offering viewers a perfect opportunity to observe just what's happening in the studios of many contemporary practitioners in the region.

The exhibit includes paintings, drawings, photographs, prints and installations, the participants contemplating subject matter that reveals varying sensibilities and aesthetics. Some of the most interesting and successful works are those

multilayered images that resonate with the mind, the artists contemplating both issues and aesthetics.

Leila Daw's evocative installation, comprised of a wall-sized mixed-media semi-abstracted canvas, "****Site," and a series of drawings of ancient sites, "Sites/Sights," explores the process of mapping as a metaphor for the attempt to locate ourselves in time and space. By adding clues and altering cultural content, by inserting alternative references and new associations,

Daw charts a highly original narrative in which a pictorial history of the past stirs up the conceptual imagination of the present, thereby posting all sorts of variations and possibilities.

Many artists comment on particular values of contemporary society.

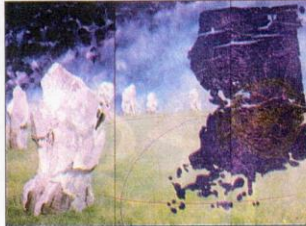
Nina Bentley's simple conceptual work addresses the complex mind/body connection. By crafting a series of reflective cones and mir-

rors, in which one sees one's own image alongside etched quotations like "step back, you'll feel better," or "you may be too close to really enjoy this," Bentley reiterates the distorted social values associated with personal identity and self-esteem.

Marc Snyder, too, alludes to the twisted values of contemporary culture, focusing on its vanities, materialism, excesses and insensitivities.

ART REVIEW

- **Title:** "2006 Invitational Exhibition"
- **Where:** John Slade Ely House, 51 Trumbull St., New Haven
- **When:** Through July 16; 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Wednesday-Friday, 2-5 p.m. Saturday, Sunday
- **Admission:** Free
- **Info:** (203) 624-8055



Leila Daw's "****Site," a mixed-media on canvas over wood.



Bridget Eileen Grady's oil on canvas, "White's Woods."

In "Spectacle," a small black-and-white linocut, Snyder creates a powerful narrative using potent visual triggers to deliver his message. One finds hero-like figures of yesteryear — astronauts,

See Exhibit, E4

See below:

Exhibit: Variety spices show

Continued from E1

athletes, crowds ogling the fins of a flashy car, beside contemporary images of hooded figures and tangled nude bodies at Abu Graib prison. Much like a photojournalist, Snyder freezes these penetrating moments of history and culture into a disquieting and jarring permanent presence.

Caryn Azoff's paintings are as loose and physical as Snyder's prints are tight and controlled.

Azoff's black-and-white acrylic paintings are intense and visceral, the figures appearing in a breathless atmosphere of melancholy and anguish, swirling in what seems to be a pool of fear and despair. The violent brushstrokes, smears and drips seem to tell stories of personal suffering, the exposed wounds parading in an unending collision of chaos and conflict where logic and reason cease to exist.

Monika Malewska's drawings comment on other aspects of the contemporary scene. Although one doesn't know exactly what is being said in "Pillsbury Doughboy," a seemingly comical narrative of doughboys interacting with dinosaur-like figures in a surreal panorama of floating forms and cookies, one picks up the tone that behind the absurd high jinks lies a layer of dark-

ness, the dreamlike narrative hinting at our propensity to lure consumers of all kinds through insertion of familiar figures we have come to love and trust.

Some of the inclusions don't make social statements, their aesthetic based on expressions of direct observation.

Bridget Eileen Grady's "White Woods" and "Barbara's Swamp," for example, of wooded vistas, tangled trees and rushing streams, is a fine painterly pair of works that evoke the physicality of nature's pres-

ence, while Chris Engstrom's painting, "Cascade," evokes the obscured mystery of urban drama.

Some of Josh Gaetjen's paintings are noteworthy in that they appear to have turned a corner, as it were, from many of his past images. Despite the inclusion of some of the candy-colored urban scapes, it's works like "Study from the Bank" and a similar untitled image, that grab one's attention. These looser works, of a more muted palette and softened contours, that move from the ultravisibility of the past to a more painterly sensibility, that finely convey the spirit of the venue — are more suggestive and less predictable, and definitely more interesting.



John Slade Ely House

Marc Snyder's Linocut "Spectacle."

Judy Birke of New Haven is a freelance writer and art consultant.