

ART

Exhibit exploring perception engages viewers

By DAN TRANBERG

SPECIAL TO THE PLAIN DEALER

"Surface Tensions," the new show at Spaces gallery, spotlights the work of nine artists from across the country, work that focuses on the limitations and possibilities of the two-dimensional surface. Painting, sculpture and projected video are used to explore subtle implications of texture, pattern and color as triggers to our conception of the visual world.

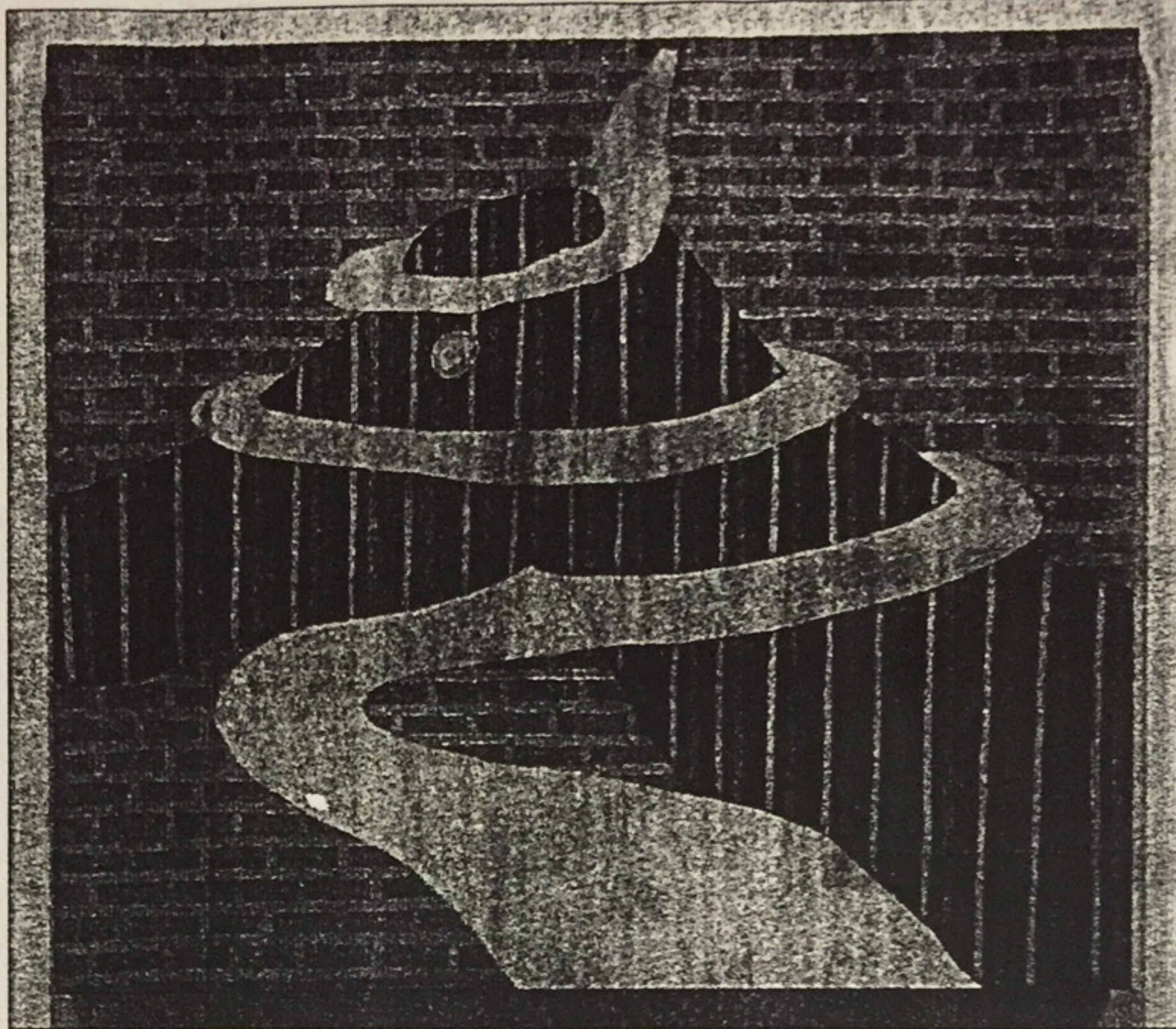
Cumulatively, the pieces provide a colorful visual laboratory in which the nature of visual perception is dissected and toyed with in an attempt to understand the relationships between images and ideas. Though their results offer varying degrees of insight, together they succeed in creating an entirely engaging experience, full of imaginative visual propositions.

Among the most provocative work in the show is a series of paintings by Los Angeles-based artist Jeanne Patterson. Wobbly sheets of patterned linoleum are used in lieu of stretched canvases, on which she paints with a combination of conventional oil paint and clear resin. An open weave of abstract shapes covers each surface, allowing the pattern of the linoleum to poke through just enough to create a confusing sense of where each shape comes from.

The elusiveness of a flat image is delightfully captured in Patterson's work, sandwiched somewhere between layers of paint and resin. A sense of tension pervades her pieces as if static pictures were being wrestled with and pinned to the wall.

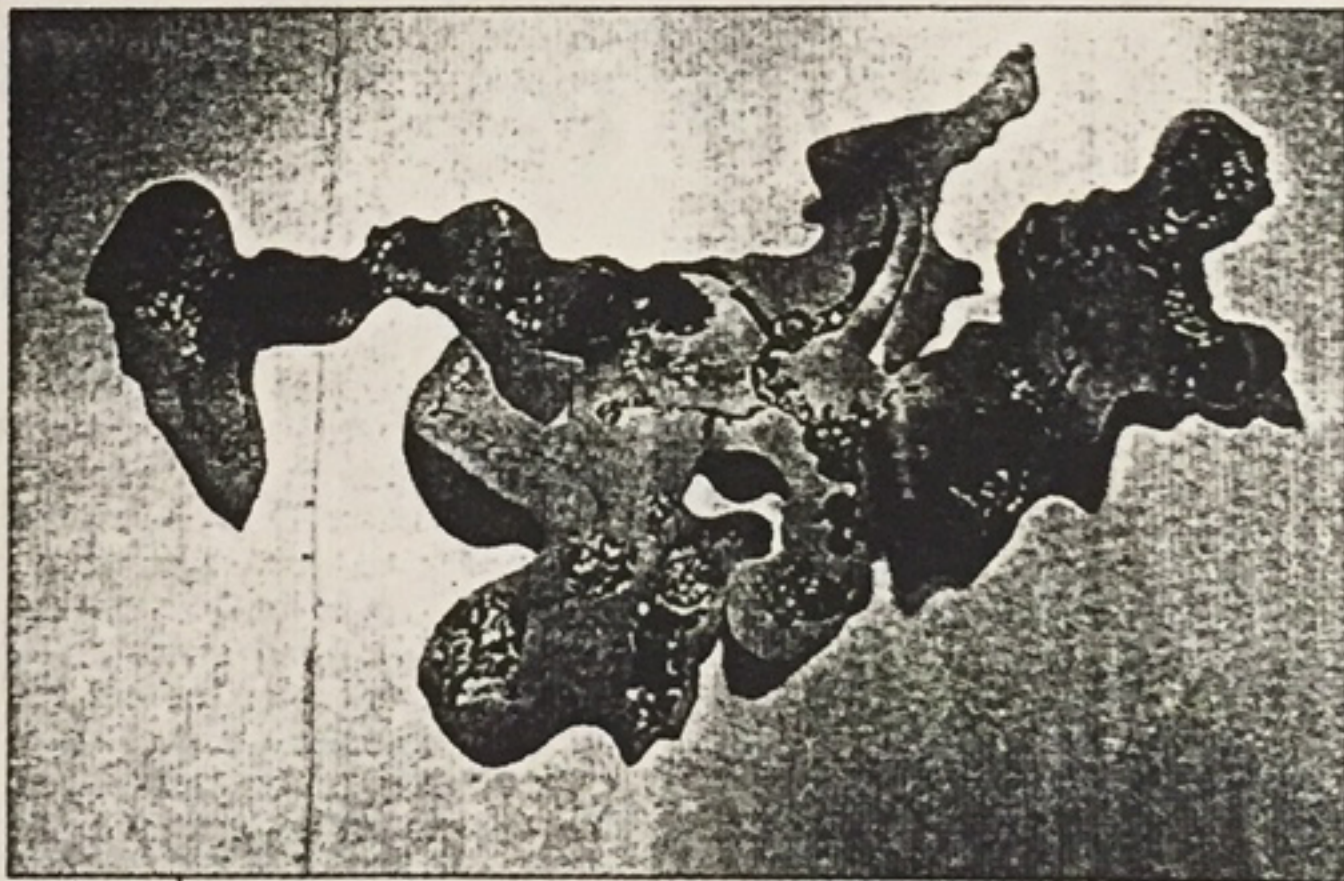
For Chicago artist Shona Macdonald, the idea of an image seems almost like an afterthought. Her works are made entirely from narrow strips of paper cut from mailing envelopes, which are then pasted onto rectangular canvases, forming vaguely landscapelike pictures. Printed patterns from the insides of the envelopes account for changes in color and texture across the surface of each piece.

Though a bit gimmicky, Mac-



JAMES A. ROSS / THE PLAIN DEALER

"Mt. Mouny," by Columbus-based artist Steve Stelling, sets up a visual game in which entangled shapes have to be sorted through by the viewer.



Some of the shapes visible in Jeanne Patterson's "Recurrents (bl-gr)," are actually printed linoleum while others are painted on with traditional oil paint.

donald's work is intriguing in the context of the show as it provides a variation on the notion of how we conceive an image by blurring together disparate bits of information. That idea alone is enough to carry them.

But according to Macdonald's artist statement, the series, which began as a collection of envelopes, is "commenting on the secretive and secure nature of mail as it floods the system." Besides pointing out the way younger artists tend to overstate the content of their work, the statement seems like an attempt to make a simple idea more charged with

meaning. It actually has the opposite effect.

Columbus-based painter Steve Stelling, on the other hand, is firmly grounded in his playful approach to creating images. By cleverly toying with the fundamental principles of painting believable spaces, Stelling creates images that intentionally contradict themselves. His results force questions concerning the nature of visual perception, the most basic of which is: What are the rules that govern how we perceive an image?

By skewing concepts such as scale and perspective, Stelling makes the viewer sort through en-

REVIEW

Spaces

What: The work of nine artists in the exhibition "Surface Tensions"
Where: 2220 Superior Viaduct, Cleveland
When: Runs through Dec. 29. Hours 11 a.m.-5:30 p.m., Tuesday through Friday; 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday; 1-5 p.m. Sunday.
Admission: Free. Call (216) 621-2314, or visit Web site <http://www.spacesgallery.org>

tangled shapes in an attempt to somehow reconcile each picture. As with Patterson's paintings, it is through that process that discoveries are made.

In Stelling's "Mt. Mouny," an oil and acrylic on canvas, the shape of a horse's head is intertwined with what could be seen as winding road. Relationships of color and texture create a tension between each visual clue. But on some level, we want to see the horse in the way one might see the face of a man in the moon.

The issues explored by the artists in this show are, in some respects, as old as art itself. But it is refreshing to see a group of younger artists genuinely searching for an expanded sense of the relationship between our three-dimensional world and the two-dimensional images we create both on walls and in our minds.

Tranberg is an artist and writer in Cleveland.