

On Exhibit

MUSEUMS ■ ART SPACES ■ GALLERIES

New Sensations

By MICHAEL O'SULLIVAN
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THERE'S GROWING evidence, even in Washington, of the international art-world trend toward fresher-and-faster, where young artists, some of whom are still in school, are selling out their first gallery shows. For the past several years, it used to be that the only local gallery where you could consistently find the work of recent and current art students was Dupont Circle's Conner Contemporary Art, whose series of "Academy" shows have, since 2001, been showcasing the work of area students, both current and recently graduated. Now there are three similarly themed shows, with Conner's neighbor, Irvine Contemporary, and the Arlington Arts Center, joining the fray.

Of the trio, Conner's "Academy 2005" is the best, with work incorporating video, performance, sculpture, painting, photography, drawing and ceramics. As of opening night, the Corcoran College of Art and Design's Zach Storm had already sold several of his \$300 watercolor-and-graphite portrait drawings based (very loosely) on such real-life art-scene fixtures as Corcoran curator Jonathan Binstock, Corcoran college dean Christina De Paul and former Corcoran teacher and artist Rex Weil. Owing at least a small debt to the quirky, one might say deliberately inept drawings of Marcel Dzama, Storm's highly affordable pieces have a real charm, along with built-in buzz. It could be interesting to see what his second act is.

Another popular opening-night piece was "Dissolve," a performance-art work in which hazmat-suited workers threw small clay vessels on a potter's wheel, and then canned them in jars filled with corn syrup, which over the course of weeks or months will cause the unfired ceramic pieces to turn to mush. While there's nothing special about the small urns, McCracken's wry meditation on the ephemeral — not to mention ceremonial — nature of art has both visual and conceptual appeal. The University of Maryland's Virginia Warwick contributes work that occupies the same territory between the conceptual and the comedic: a black-and-white photograph of a dead mouse alongside an array of lovingly crafted but empty "Mouse Coffins."

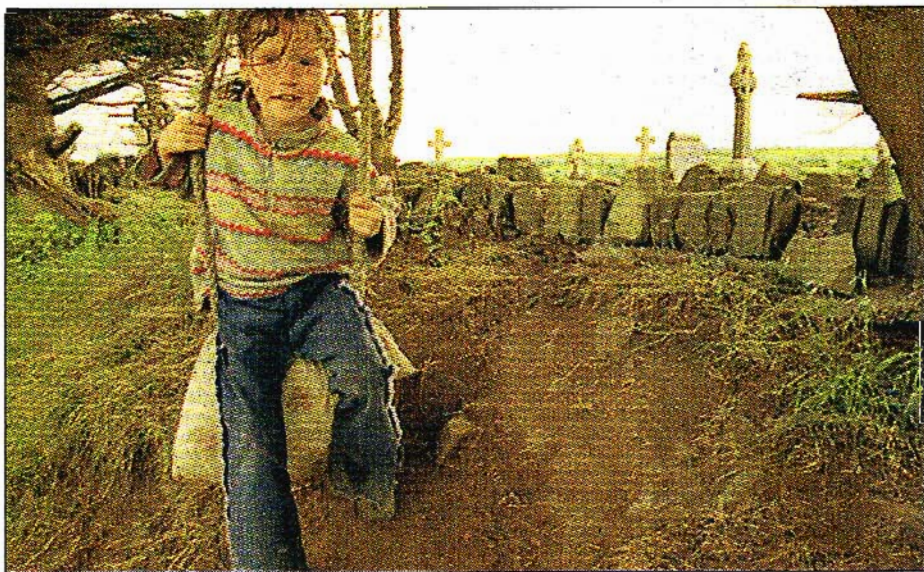
At Irvine, a single photograph by the Maryland Institute College of Art's Gina Bocker has already sold several copies. Part of a photojournalistic series called "The Donovans and Other Settled Travelers," Bocker's strongly composed image depicts a young Irish boy, part of a large extended family of itinerant workers, sitting on a makeshift rope swing against the backdrop of a cemetery. The statement it makes, about the cycle of life and death, is a powerful one.

Suzanna Fields of Virginia Commonwealth University is another standout here, as she was in the recent "Strictly Painting" show at the McLean Project for the Arts and as she no doubt will be when her work appears in the Washington Project for the Arts/Corcoran's upcoming "Options" biennial. Her work here, which cleverly blends sculpture and painting and features a fireplace-mantel installation



VIRGINIA WARWICK/CONNER CONTEMPORARY ART

Virginia Warwick's "Mouse Coffins," part of the show at Conner Contemporary Art.



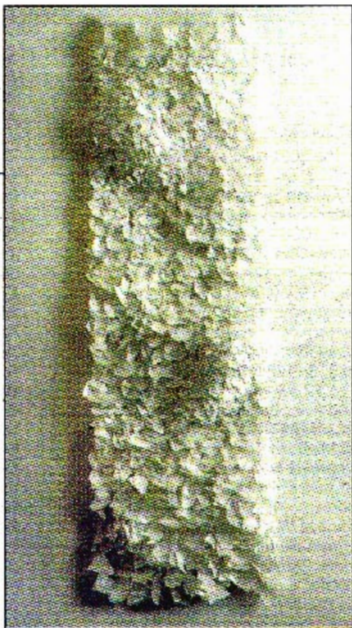
IRVINE CONTEMPORARY

This print by Gina Bocker from her series "The Donovans and Other Settled Travellers" has proven popular at the Irvine Contemporary show.

halfway between the gaiety of party streamers and the funereality of a flag-draped coffin, is something to keep an eye on.

Diana Al-Hadid's room-size installation of fiberglass, painted polystyrene foam and steel, "Attack of the Actual Factual in the Golden Galaxy," is another betwixt-and-be-

tween art piece, evoking both the decorative excess of Bernini and the expressionistic gesture of modern dance. You'll find another of Al-Hadid's uninhibited pieces — called, in a somewhat unfortunate evocation of both hippies and soft-core porn, "Spasm Plasm" — at the Arlington Arts Center, where it shares



BY MEGAN BIDDLE

Megan Biddle's glass and mixed media work "Plumage" at the Arlington Arts Center.

space, and a certain pleasing over-the-top quality with "Plumage" by Megan Biddle of VCU. Comprising hundreds of bits of white broken glass, Biddle's relief sculpture is a spiritual cousin to Chakaia Booker's automobile-tire collages, albeit one whose sensual beauty is more brittle and fragile than Booker's.

I think it's great that more and more galleries are starting to mine for art-school gold. It can be an education, not just for the artists, who gain valuable real-world experience, but also for the gallerists, who clearly are learning that there's a potential payoff in sales of work by artists who haven't yet stood the test of time. Mostly though, it's the art lovers who are the real winners, as long as they're willing to study — and play — the odds.

ACADEMY 2005 — Through Aug. 27 at Conner Contemporary Art, 1730 Connecticut Ave. NW (Metro: Dupont Circle). 202-588-8750. www.connercontemporary.com. Open Tuesday-Saturday noon to 5. Free.

INTRODUCTIONS — Through Sept. 3 at Irvine Contemporary, 1710 Connecticut Ave. NW (Metro: Dupont Circle). 202-332-8767. www.irvinecontemporary.com. Open Tuesday-Saturday 10 to 6. Free.

2005 MFA GRADUATES EXHIBITION — Through Aug. 27 at the Arlington Arts Center, 3550 Wilson Blvd., Arlington (Metro: Virginia Square). 703-248-6800. www.arlingtonartscenter.org. Open Tuesday-Saturday 11 to 5. Free.