

ART REVIEW

Show of tradition at RISD

Keeping up with the latest shifts and trends in the art world is never easy. But if artistic trend-spotting is your idea of a good time, there's no better place to do it than the RISD Graduate Students Annual Exhibition at the Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design. The show, which opens today, features works of more than 50 young artists.

Perhaps the biggest surprise is the large number of paintings and the relatively small number of conceptually-based works. Like a number of recent exhibitions of contemporary art, including the 1995 Whitney Biennial, the RISD show suggests a return to more traditional materials and techniques.

But don't call Jesse Helms and tell him to break out the bourbon just yet. Rather than abandoning the conceptually based art of the past few years, many of these artists have tried to find a middle ground between the work of art and the idea (or ideas) behind it. A similar trend was evident at this year's Whitney Biennial, where the guiding concepts were "beauty," "sensuousness" and "metaphor."

This viewer-friendly approach can be seen in the three large paintings by Christopher Chappell that greet visitors to the museum's Daphne Farago Wing. With bright colors and swirling brushstrokes, they look like Day-Glo versions of a ticker-tape parade.

Other painters of note include Donna Avedisian, whose *Tillinghast Red Maple* may be the largest painting ever shown in a grad student show; George Sanchez, a Cuban-born artist who combines political satire with a snappy graphic sense, and Bob Napper, whose three paintings look like the work of three artists.

The show also reveals a trend toward small, collage-like paintings and drawings. Examples include Shazia Sikander's small gouaches, which resemble updated versions

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By Bill Van Siclen

of Persian miniatures; Karen Butler's tiny drawings of cakes and sweets, and Jennie Portnof's batik-like drawings on muslin.

As usual, the RISD furniture program is well represented. Of special interest are Shawn Goodell's fanciful chairs and chaise longues, Shawn Kudelka's lighted screens and a series of funky mixed media pieces by Jack Kearney.

For more adventurous tastes, the sculpture/installation category features the work of Danica Phelps and Marguerite Kahrl. Phelps is interested in the way women are portrayed in the mass media and pornography.

Her *One Ton Bale*, for example, consists of a huge block of shredded supermarket tabloids and pornographic magazines. Phelps has also constructed her own peep show. It's called *Rhythm* and comes complete with chairs, a peep hole and clips from pornographic movies.

Kahrl, meanwhile, is represented by something called *Zone Fourteen; Approaching Faith*. On a huge sheet of paper Kahrl has drawn dozens of small doodle-like images. In the front of the drawing stands a card table on which many of these same images appear as small painted sculptures — like pieces from a surrealistic board game. I have no idea what *Zone Fourteen* is about, but it has a dreamy, *Alice In Wonderland* quality that's immediately appealing.

The RISD Graduate Students Annual Exhibition continues through June 4 at the RISD art museum, 224 Benefit St. in Providence. Hours are Friday, Saturday, Tuesday and Wednesday 10:30 a.m.-5 p.m.; Thursday noon-8 p.m. and Sunday 2-5 p.m.