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HOUSTON

Lifestyle & Entertainment

'96 show offers many styles, more refinement

By **PATRICIA C. JOHNSON**
Houston Chronicle

The 1996 Houston Area Show arrives as expected, with a variety of media, a veritable soup of expressive styles and multiple levels of sophistication.

Entries from more than 350 artists were pared down to 143 works representing 105 artists. The jury included two artists, Mary Miss and Luis Jiménez, and Contemporary Arts Museum curator Dana Friis-Hansen.

Art review

The selection is not as dumb and confusing as the 1994 version of the show, when first prize was awarded to a ridiculous object consisting of a brick, made from a household sponge, with a playing card of a Vargas-girl-type glued to it.

This time, refinement of concept and realization of intent are more evident, though there are plenty of "slackers" in the mix. Keep in mind, however, that

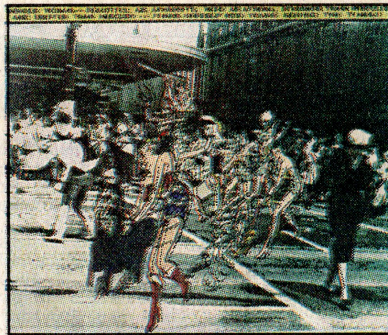
the vast majority of the artists are emerging and even student.

A three-part assemblage by D. Jabari Anderson won the \$1,500 first-place award. Titled *Picket Fence Dreams*, the wood, ink and paper installation combines the nostalgic image of a white picket fence with the obvious refer-

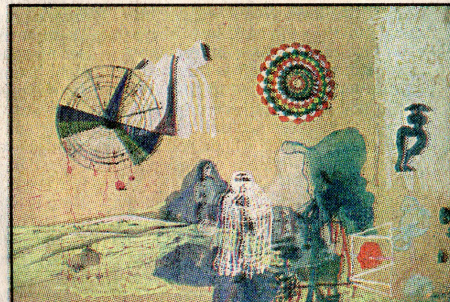
ence to the edgy television program of today and twists them into a dark commentary about family myths.

Shahzia Sikander, who received the \$1,000 second prize for a trio of small works on paper, constructs fragile drawings using vegetable dyes. Her delicate descriptions of multi-armed figures and pastoral landscapes present abstracted, veiled women and swirling shapes with a definite flavor of Persian miniatures, minus narrative or illustration.

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Left: *Wonder Woman Tidies Up* by Bonnie Smith Newman
Right: *Picket Fence Dreams* by D. Jabari Anderson
Below: *Up-rooted* by Shahzia Sikander



Art

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Bonnie Newman's *Wonder Woman Tidies Up*, awarded the \$500 third prize, has the most enduring impact. This is a large-scale, altered photograph in which the comic-book character whirls on Houston's Main Street at Foley's, in the middle of a parade. She's been injected into the scene among the majorettes and an audience that doesn't seem amused. Newman's sophisticated composition can be read as a commentary on parades as a spectator sport and festive event — which here is neither. They're also civic trash-makers, requiring "superhuman" efforts to clean up; Wonder Woman gets a jump on things, dusting and sweeping as the parade moves along.

But in this scene, too, a woman in 1950s dress seen on the lower right corner scampers away from the parade and Wonder Woman herself. She seems preoccupied, bowing her white-hatted head in determination to get away as quickly as possible.

The biggest surprise of the exhibit lies in the many works that would be comfortable labeled as "folk art." Although the past decade has seen the division between "folk" and "fine" crumble, the intuitively assembled, glued and painted work of the self-taught, nonprofessional, outside-the-mainstream artist is being co-opted as a style by educated men and women wise in the ways of the art market.

A panel discussion titled *Definitions of Houston Art* in conjunction with the exhibition will be at 7 p.m. Feb. 22 in the University of Houston's Dudley Hall. The panelists will include Susie Kalil, director of visual art at DiverseWorks; Alison de Lima Greene, curator of 20th-century art at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; art dealer Betty Moody; artist Gael Stack; and moderator Don Bacigalupi, director of the Blaffer Gallery.

1996 Houston Area Exhibition

Where: Blaffer Gallery, University of Houston, Entrance 16 off Cullen Blvd., 743-9530

When: 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesdays-Fridays, 1-5 p.m. Saturdays-Sundays. Through March 31.