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ART

Two Unprovincial Shows at the Jersey City Museum

By VIVIEN RAYNOR

JERSEY CITY "PAIR GROUP" and "Construction in Process" are two shows running concurrently at the Jersey City Museum (472 Jersey Avenue at Montgomery Street). However, beyond a bias toward the nonobjective, a markedly somber atmosphere and a closing date of next Saturday, they have nothing in common.

Assembled by William Zimmer, an art critic for, among other publications, the late *Soho News*, "Pair Group" is a sequel to a similar but smaller display, also chosen by Mr. Zimmer, earlier in the year at Art Galaxy, an alternative space in Manhattan. (Commendably, the Jersey City Museum does not confine itself to its own state or to its own judgments in the search for new artists.)

Although a few have taught in New Jersey, the contributors to the present event — eight men and four women — are all New Yorkers and all relative unknowns in their 30's.

Each is represented by two works. This is not unusual, but Mr. Zimmer has made an issue of it, saying in a short introduction to the show that a pair of related paintings, aside from implying a series, illustrates "the extension of a thought."

As already indicated, the show generally is subdued, lacking all together the facetiousness in much recent art, figurative and nonobjective. Abstract Expressionism has been the

dominant influence in some cases, geometric abstraction in others.

At the Expressionist end of the spectrum is Zigi Ben-Haim, whose canvases have the heroic bluster of a Mark di Suvero sculpture; their contours suggest beams hurled together.

Determined by these outlines are broad expanses of shredded newspaper and smaller stretches of brown paper and crumpled fabric, all accented by, or interspersed with, stains and splashes of color — red, blue, green, cream, silver and black.

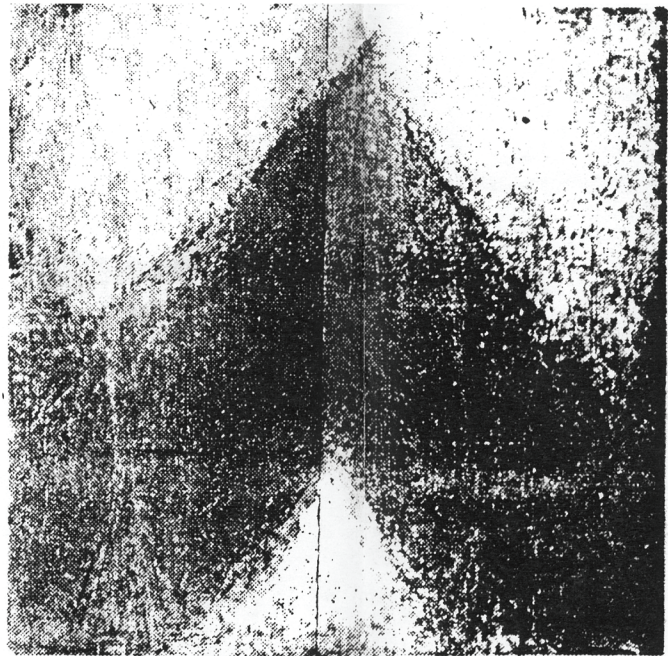
Also weighty in character is William Fares's chevron shape, expressed in yellowish white against dark brown and vice versa. The paint in these strong but vaguely unpleasant canvases is intensely and rather angrily worked.

Texture is also important to Catherine Porter-Scully, who impastoes and striates her pigment as well as combing passages of it in the same direction, and whose canvases, if merged, would make an eccentric coat of arms quartered in yellow and orange, black and silver gray.

Sean Scully, on the other hand, combines emotional paint with imagery that is more laconic: evenly spaced dark-blue bars across irregular but rectangular grounds of drab yellow.

Eva Weias Bentzon indolently explores an all-over style of abstract Expressionism by means of short strokes of greenish black against red and of dark blue and light green on pink.

Bob Yucikas's up and down rhythms owe something to abstract Expressionism, too, but his soft, pris-



Among the paintings currently on view at the Jersey City Museum. Exhibition ends Saturday.

matic colors are reminiscent of Cézanne. Velled with a watery white scumble, they are the most hedonistic

works in the show, along with those by Linda Levit. This artist's tall canvases, although

basically about verticals subtly balanced by short diagonals and horizontals, have the flavor of Matisse about them. Grounds in both cases are lavender and the stripes — in blues, reds, yellow and so forth — are usually rimmed in thin black lines.

Geometry is, by definition, cool, but John Ford infuses his with a kind of realist gusto. The interlocking black and yellow circles and shafts that pack his sizable canvases burst out at the spectator as if in celebration of machinery. Yet they are neatly contrived abstractions with implications of space and other trompe l'oeil touches.

The four remaining exhibitors fall more or less into the minimal category. Most of David Reed's shapes are gestural, such as the single sweep, on a black ground, of a wide brush loaded with white. They are so carefully calculated as to suggest that the artist is compiling a glossary of all possible marks to be made in painting.

The polygonal canvases of Ted Stamm, banded in black on all sides but one, contrive to seem at odds while at the same time complementing each other. The same can be said of Russell Maltz's fields of gray, whose irregular edges, stopping short of a canvas's, create outright visual conflict. The illusion is of narrow white margins sliding around.

The most minimal — and most polished — of the pieces come from Heidi Glück, who composes with a very few fine lines in, say, orange, black, blue and pink against crimson, with a sensitive eye for her formats.

The suspicion that some of the artists have produced paintings expressly to fit Mr. Zimmer's somewhat literary idea is unverifiable, but strong nevertheless.

A few images — Mr. Scully's and Miss Weiss Bentzon's — are too meager to support two investigations, let alone a series. But there is something grave and authentic about the show as a whole that is right for the time.

"Construction in Process" is a report on an extraordinary exhibition held last year in the independent galleries in Lodz, Poland.

The museum exhibition, organized by the sculptor Richard Nonas, consists of a great deal of explanatory text, as well as blown-up photographs of the vast factory building in which the art spectacular took place, of some of the Conceptual art displayed and of several participating artists.

Documenting the show in greater, if incoherent, detail is a catalogue, in English, compiled by Mr. Nonas, Peter Downsborough and Fred Sandback.

Enthusiastically supported by Solidarity, "Construction in Process," Mr. Nonas says, was the first cultural event since World War II not to be organized by the Polish Government or the Communist Party.

Factories gave materials for the project, workers their time and labor. When it was ready, hundreds of people went to see the installation, the films and performances and to hear the discussions and speeches. ■