

ART REVIEW

# *Works From New Talent Seeking a Boldface Name*

By Benjamin Genocchio

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The alternative art scene in Newark can be a hit-or-miss proposition, but City Without Walls and Rupert Ravens Contemporary are two galleries that do a pretty good job of finding and promoting talented young and emerging artists. Both are worth a visit at the moment.

The annual Metro show at City Without Walls, one of the oldest juried exhibitions of small works in the country, displays pieces that are 13 inches or less in each direction. The title originally referred to the tradition of moving the art by rail to various cities around New Jersey. Today, the organizers use many forms of transportation, but the exhibition's premise remains the same: to provide little-known newcomers an opportunity to display their work in a statewide, yearlong touring exhibition.

This year's show, the 26th, includes 69 works by 43 artists selected by a jury of prominent New York art world figures. It is a slick, handsome exhibition, with the accent on finely detailed figurative paintings. There is also some good photography and, happily, an absence of the kooky stuff that has marred previous shows.



Jen Mazza's "Josh No. 4," at City Without Walls.

Paintings by Lauren Ennist, Jen Mazza and Claudia Waters catch the eye, partly because they are colorful and partly because they are well executed. The figurative subject matter is often clichéd but shows all three artists, who are still warming up in their careers, trying to expand from the merely pretty into something more serious.

While eclecticism is the norm in these sorts of shows, Metro 26 includes a concentration of excellent photographs. Marco Muñoz won the best in show prize for a series of intimate pictures of youths playing football in a park, shrouded in mist. Collectively titled "Voices From the Fog," they herald the arrival of a new talent.

Among other outstanding photographs are Aimee Hertog's wickedly funny "Hamptons Fun v. Iowa Flood," in which the artist has digitally collaged imagery of people swimming in the Hamptons into flooded urban landscape scenes from Iowa. The juxtaposition is so incongruous and silly that you can't help but laugh.



Marco Muñoz's "Voices From the Fog No. 4,"  
at City Without Walls.

As usual, the show is well supplied with collage and sculpture, some of which is interesting, like Jan Huling's oddball assemblage "Kid Stuff," combining beading and little cameos. Greg Leshé's "Mobile Auto-Graph Writing Pile No. 2" is also intriguing, consisting of piles of circular paper covered in line drawings and resting on turntables with wheels. I didn't see it in motion, so have no idea how it works, but I love its ingenuity.

A fierce creative intelligence is also in abundance nearby at Rupert Ravens Contemporary, Newark's newest major commercial gallery, which opened in 2007, spread over three levels of an old furniture warehouse on Market Street. The current exhibition is "Next Post," an impressive show of 18 simultaneous solo projects by artists from Europe and America. It grabs your attention from the moment you walk in the door.

Two colorful projects fill the ground-floor entrance area, Donald Bruschi's wood and steel sculptures with neon lights and Saya Woolfalk's odd installation consisting of an exotic sculpture made of trash that resembles an old-fashioned computer in a room with a lime-green floor and blue walls. It is not entirely resolved in my view, but Ms. Woolfalk seems to have the talent to take her strange project to the next level.

Anakin Koenig of AK Airways in front of the sculpture "Drop" at Rupert Ravens Contemporary gallery.  
Timothy Ivy for The New York Times

Many other surprises await those willing to venture deeper into this behemoth of a space, including Cordy Ryman's simple but attractive painted geometric sculptures that are made entirely using 2-by-4-inch wood studs. Miya Ando's refined, subtle works of rolled steel, made of sheets of burnished and chemically treated metal, are also a must-see for anyone interested in post-minimalist contemporary art.

Headlining the show is "Drop," an inflatable 60-foot orange cone-shaped sculpture by a group of artists known as AK Airways that fills half the length of the second-floor gallery from ceiling to floor. Lighted from inside, it gives off a subtle amber glow. The theme of the work, Mr. Ravens said, was the fragile and provisional nature of human existence.

Other works are equally spectacular, like Gae Savannah's opulent assemblage sculptures using glass beads, trinkets, reams of gossamer and other cheap objects and materials relating to shopping and the beauty industry. Her assemblages are risky, but when they come together there is a wonderful sense of lushness and overflowing color.

If all this sounds a little too edgy or experimental, the show also includes a couple of paintings by Fred Gutzeit that soothe the soul. His subject is the landscape, chiefly scenes of rocks and foliage. Here, among hard-core assemblages, junk and inflatable sculptures, they look like bashful visitors from another world.

“Metro 26,” City Without Walls, 6 Crawford Street, Newark, to May 1.

Information: (973) 622-1188 or  
[citywithoutwalls.com](http://citywithoutwalls.com).

“Next Post,” Rupert Ravens Contemporary, 85 Market Street, Newark, to April 11. Information: (973) 353-0110  
or [rupertravens.net](http://rupertravens.net).