

The New York Times

August 20, 2010_

‘Young Curators, New Ideas III’

By HOLLAND COTTER

P.P.O.W.

511 West 25th Street, Room 301

Chelsea

Through Friday



Vagueness has been in vogue this summer, and many group shows have been in puzzler mode, with gassy themes, an abstract look and a hermetic affect. In some cases, like “The Evryali Score” at David Zwirner, the mode worked. In most it didn’t. The best you could hope for was an artist who stood out, as Patricia Esquivias did in the otherwise wan “Mass Ornament” at Gladstone.

P.P.O.W.’s “Young Curators, New Ideas III” is made up of six puzzler mini-shows, all installed in the gallery, all based on exhibition proposals submitted to the overseeing curator, Amani Olu. The proposals, posted on the gallery’s Web site (ppowgallery.com), are dense expositions of ideas that include the overworked (critiques of celebrity, originality, modernism), the rarely tackled (equine husbandry) and the academic-arcane (the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle in quantum mechanics). Too often, the proposals are more interesting to read than the shows are to look at.

In one exhibition, called “Personal/Public/Private” and conceived by Liza Buzytsky and Andrew Russeth, four artists, including Ms. Buzytsky, ostensibly restore personal content to certain discredited modernist forms like painting. But the show is indistinguishable from the many other riffs on formalism that have represented the summer’s other group exhibition trend.

In “Quantum Limbo,” the curator Stamatina Gregory presents the work of two artists, Julia Oldham (collaborating with Eric Corwin and Maxime Clusel) and Brian Clifton. Ms. Oldham and Mr. Clifton refer to the uncertainty principle in physics in their work — video in her case, painting in his — but neither clarifies or dramatizes a difficult subject. Instead, they essentially give us a proposal with visual footnotes, the equivalent of mystifying classroom demonstrations.

Sort of that way too is Bryan Graf’s dissection of landscape photography in the solo show of his work organized by Kate Greenberg and Hilary Schaffner. But he lets you follow his ideas being considered from piece to piece so you can feel included in the process. That sense of inclusion is still more immediate in an installation by Jan Tichy. (Gabriella Hiatt is the curator.) Here, through a play of abstract video projections, the white-painted space you’re standing in very slowly — one inch at a time, it seems — goes very dark. The piece hints at a link between spreading darkness and an oil spill, though less specific readings offer themselves too.

This doesn't seem to be true of a third solo show, presented by the curator Erin Dziedzic and consisting of a photographic installation by Craig Drennen. The installation is based on a well-known 1986 piece called "Talent" by David Robbins, which consisted of glamorous studio headshots of several artists — Jeff Koons, Cindy Sherman, Jenny Holzer and so on — who were becoming stars at the time. Mr. Drennen has applied disfiguring glops of paint to prints of the portraits, as if to undercut the notion of fame, which, of course, they were meant to send up. There are other things going on — the proposal mentions Mr. Drennen's immersion in Shakespeare — but it's hard to know what.

I'm inclined to say the same of work chosen by the curator James Shaeffer: drawings, exhibited as digital prints, by Victor Vaughn, that deal with a bond between horse and man, and photographs of nude extraterrestrials by the intriguing artist-team called AIDS-3D (Daniel Keller and Nik Kosmas). What there's no mistaking, though, is that the work of both Mr. Vaughn and AIDS-3D can be downloaded free from the Internet, so that what's on the gallery wall is no better (or worse) than what I pull from my printer.

The subject of what is gained and lost in art in the age of mechanical reproduction is ancient by now. But the question of what art's future might be on the accessible, untamable Internet is still a bit new. And cyberspace remains, so far, a curator-challenging frontier. **HOLLAND COTTER**