State Exhibit Conservative in Outlook

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Arts Reviewer

The 32nd annual Louisiana State Art Exhibition for Professional Artists is a tightly juried, pleasant show, but there is little in the way of excitement or innovation to stir the eye or the senses. As a statement on the status of visual art it is basically calm, uniform in quality and conservative in outlook.

IT IS PRIMARILY a painting show, with a few pieces of sculpture, some fine jewelry and a handful of ceramic works included. And although realism is the dominant theme, the award winners are hard edge abstracts and fantasy.

Comments on the impact of the show as a whole are difficult, and perhaps unfair, since the problems of viewing an exhibition in the Jay R. Broussard Memorial Galleries of the Old State Capitol are legion. The main hall, the Old House Chamber, is distinguished by disastrous lighting, and the works are hung on screens, front and back, requiring the viewer to negotiate a maze in order to see all the work. This doesn't make for a cohesive exhibit, but rather leaves spectators a little exhausted and wondering if something has been missed in the search.

This is a long standing condition, of course, and I'm not quite sure why this show seemed to emphasize the problems of the exhibit rooms. Probably because an effort to get some kind of feeling for what is going on in professional art in Louisiana produced instead a feeling of frustration.

UNQUESTIONABLY some of the sense of deja vu is accounted for by the preponderance of Baton Rouge artists in the show. Many of the accepted works are not only by artists whose style is familiar, but they have been shown here previously. This is not a criticism of the selection, but it does make the show less exciting for local gallery goers. It is gratifying to see local artists well represented, however.

In a changed award procedure, this year's winners are all purchase awards, and only three were named. The three paintings will be added to the permanent collection at the gallery.


The Warrens painting, "Spot in Eden," is a gouache, a fine example of the artist's satirical visual commentary. His rather fuzzy-headed serpent is a particular delight.

Both Rector and Wardlaw are abstractionists. Rector's acrylic "Silver Silver II" is minimal, cool, hard edge painting. Three grey panels, varying ever so slightly in tone, are accented with the thinnest hands of color. Wardlaw's large untitled acrylic stain is more complex, done in pastels with a successful arrangement of colored stripes in the central segment of a large neutral area.

FANS OF REALISM will likely protest the omission of several good examples of this style from the winner's circle, but the spare, clean lined abstracts took the juror's eye.

More than half of the 62 artists in the show are Baton Rougeans, and most of their work has no surprise. A couple of relatively new names show interesting ideas, such as William Thomas' powerful and erotic oil, Van Wade-day's imaginative construction and Donna Eble's intellectually complex mixed media.

The show is enriched by a fine polished bronze by New Orleans sculptor Sandra Zahn Oreck, the first of her works to be shown here. Mark Bercier of Lafayette exhibits a powerful and imaginative talent in his oil self-portrait and a stunning plastic and aluminum sculpture by C. Roy Blackwood of Hammond is the most arresting object in the show.

THE 25 PIECE EXHIBIT was culled from a total of 456 submitted works, and most of them have sufficient merit to justify the trouble of skirting your way through the gallery maze. The show will hang through Dec. 11.