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60 artists show off their own interests

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Art/Joanna Shaw-Eagle

Touchstone Gallery's laudable "Double Vision: One Space, Sixty Local Artists" adds a new twist to the Washington art scene.

Like most "co-op" or artist-owned galleries, Touchstone pursues a different goal from commercial spaces in that it represents artists' tastes rather than a motivation for profit.

In viewing the exhibit, however, visitors need to understand that its artists must first pass a stiff selection process by the 30-year-old gallery's board of directors.

This particular show has been preselected by both the gallery entry procedures and the 30 artists who each got to choose a "guest" artist they admire.

It's not surprising, then, that selections resulted in an intriguing range of ages, mediums and quality.

Initially, consider that Maya Mackrandilal, a fellow at the University of Virginia at Charlottesville, chose her teacher, William Bennett, an associate professor of sculpture there, as her guest. The juxtaposition couldn't be more dramatic.

While Mr. Bennett is thoroughly American, Miss Mackrandilal calls herself "a multiracial, multicultural, multiroled woman." (Her mother is Indo-Guyanese, her father Belgian.) Obviously, this background perfectly fits her pursuits as an international artist.

In the exhibit's installation, "Oral History II," she says, "I aim to show my foreign and American roots.

"I used cloth sent from India as the supportive background and Indian classical dance gestures for the stylized wax hands," she notes.

Yet another interest is what she calls "the sexualized female body" from which different persona such as nurturer and challenger can emerge.

Mr. Bennett's impressive art deals with the female form as well.

In the somewhat ungainly pregnant form of "Belly Scepter," he stretches the "body" up to what could be a "head." In the rounded middle, he centers what he calls the "belly" and attenuated "belly button."

It's a big plus that he effectively uses laminated polychrome stone to enhance its simple form.

By contrast, gallery artist Janathel Shaw's powerful "Kraak Baby" overwhelms guest artist Malia Kai's weaker "Infinity: A Song for Anika," although both deal with sadness.

Miss Shaw, who teaches in the District's public schools, says, "As an educator, I hear and see a little too much of the dark side of society and how drugs, especially crack, destroy the family dynamic.

"It's insidious. One of the worst lows is to have a child born addicted to the substance, as in 'Kraak Baby.' "

She meant it to carry a "terrible message," she says, and points out that Miss Kai is mourning the death of her daughter, although her "Song" is not captioned to say so.

Other artist combinations, such as Tory Cowles and Kathy Beynette of Alexandria's Torpedo Factory, are opposites. Miss Cowles, a painter who also works as a carpenter and home builder, presents an eye-catching, red-hued acrylic "No. 423" and says her other skills combine with her painting interests.

She chose her friend Kathy Beynette's "Badmitten Kittens" for its insouciant humor.

WHAT: "Double Vision: One Space, Sixty Artists"

WHERE: Touchstone Gallery, 406 Seventh St. NW

WHEN: 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesdays through Fridays, 12 to 5 p.m. weekends, through Feb. 3

TICKETS: Free

PHONE: 202/347-2787

WEB: www.touchstonegallery.com