

NOTES ON NEW TALENT 1

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I have always thought, rather naively it seems, that exhibitions with the title "New Talent" could and should provide the opportunity for one to see art that has, if nothing else, an extraordinary sense of urgency, art that was made because the artist had to make it. The desire to make art may sometimes outstrip the technical skill and formal understanding of a discipline that is needed for art to be eloquent and poetic, but the work of artists with this kind of intense desire often resonates with a raw energy and immediacy that mature artists find enviable.

The question is why there was so little of this kind of work in "New Talent" this year? There are two possible reasons. One is that young, institutionally trained artists have begun to think of art making more as a career than an activity whose goal is to make the nature of things around us visible. They are taught to be visually clever and to rely heavily on craft as a major element of their work. They develop a veneer of erudition and sophistication about art that would have intimidated many of the early Abstract Expressionists. Every mark these young artists make is calculated to bring them national prominence and stardom. The pressures of careerism have, in short, forced young artists to try and appear as visually mature and accomplished as those "successful" artists they have been taught to emulate.

The second possibility, which is perhaps more to the point, is that the DuPont Circle Galleries, in response to the conservative nature of Washington's art consumers, rejected out of hand any art which had too much emotion or was too coarse, or that did not have some kind of pedigree (no matter how obscure) that their clientele could identify.

Whatever the case, it seems that the DuPont Circle Galleries have, yet again, let a valuable opportunity slip through their fingers. They have the perfect vehicle for educating their collectors and expanding their often-narrow definition of what really good art can be. They have instead, for the most part, remained content with reflecting and reinforcing Washington's confined view of art. If the galleries at Dupont Circle are unwilling or unable to provide the kind of work one has the right to expect from "new talent," then they should not continue to taunt us year after year with the prospect.