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Review: Messin' with Texas/Hyde Park Art Center

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RECOMMENDED

"Messin' with Texas" at the Hyde Park Art Center is an eclectic group show of eight mid-career artists from Houston, Texas, all recipients of the 2010 Artadia Award. Artadia is a nonprofit organization that awards grants to artists in five U.S. cities, including Chicago. This exhibition was part of an exchange with DiverseWorks in Houston, which recently displayed the work of the 2008 Artadia Awardees from Chicago. It is important to note that Artadia grants are given to individuals and grantees are not selected on the grounds of a cohesive group exhibition. As a result, the works in this show are quite disparate, although some relationships emerge. David Aylsworth's thickly painted abstractions of floating geometric forms share a surprising lightness and playfulness with Bill Davenport's sculpture, "Super U," a giant pink painted plywood "U" that fills the center of the gallery. There is a similar precision and emphasis on systems in Augusto Di Stefano's drawing, "Plan for History," as in Jeff Shore and Jon Fisher's wall-mounted sculpture, "Cliff Hanger," a grid of wires, hard drives and cameras that feed images to a flat screen TV. These formal similarities create some resonance between the works, but what is most compelling in the show is actually the dissonance between Nestor Topchy's contemporary take on elaborately painted Ukrainian Easter eggs (pysanky) and Nathaniel Donnett's gold-foiled objects displayed in a glass case on black velvet shelves with tiny white paper tags on which is simply scrawled "priceless." Although they share a similar color palette and attention to display, they are also at odds: Topchy embraces the tradition of devotional objects, whereas Donnett's work is markedly more critical of material culture. That all of these works are pressed into a small gallery lays bare their differences. This aside, the exhibition provides an important model. Expanding art communities like Chicago and Houston, where established artists have put down roots, would benefit from more exchanges like this one that spark dialogue between two communities. (Regan Golden-McNerney)

Through September 11 at the Hyde Park Art Center, 5020 South Cornell.