

# Salon Should Have Been Better

By WENDY WILSON

This is the show that has no right to be so good. So says Robert E. Ewing, a former Festival of the Arts director and director of the Museum of Fine Arts, who has seen four years of Festival shows and several museum Biennials.

Still, it is not good enough. It also has every right to be better, because gallery exhibitions throughout the year show that there is a creative cornucopia in the state. But its rich scope is not evident in "A Santa Fe Salon: The Wild West and All the Rest," in the second-floor galleries at Sweeney Center, through Oct. 19.

One reason the show falls short of expectations could very well be its limitations to Santa Fe County residents, unlike last year's Festival Invitational, which included artists from throughout New Mexico. Exit James Harrill, Nick Abdalla, Aaron Karp, Randy Lee White, many Pueblo Indian artists, and so on.

Several of Santa Fe's fine painters such as Whitman Johnson and John Fincher are also conspicuously absent. The salon's potential further is reduced by the absence of Western realists. Although they were approached by Festival officials and invited to hang their work, many of these artists are so much in demand that they did not have canvases or sculptures to spare. The sculpture entries were sparse, too; out of some 132 artists in the show, only 25 are sculptors.

Also absent are entries from many Indian artists: Grey Cohoe, R.C. Gorman, Michael Naranjo, Earl Eder, Henry Gobin and others. The nine Indian artists whose work is on display are only a small representation of those who show regularly here in Santa Fe.

Spanish artists are even more seriously underrepresented, and include only Eliseo Rodriguez, Frederico M. Vigil, Gilberto Guzman and Oliver Ortiz. So, sadly, it seems that an Anglo show has been mounted by Anglos, and perhaps only for us. There is no melting pot of cultures at the Salon show.

Just like each previous show, this year's Salon show was assembled using the helter-skelter method, as Ewing characterized it. And the process of

selecting work was as changeable as the clichéd chameleon.

Last spring, the Festival office sent a letter to all artists in last year's Invitational show who live in Santa Fe County. The letter said that Ewing and Jan Adlemann, the Festival's director, would visit their studios and select a piece for the Salon show. This process was later amended, when advertisements in city newspapers invited any Santa Fe County artist to bring slides or original works to two showings at the Inn at Loretto, at which time Adlemann would select additional work.

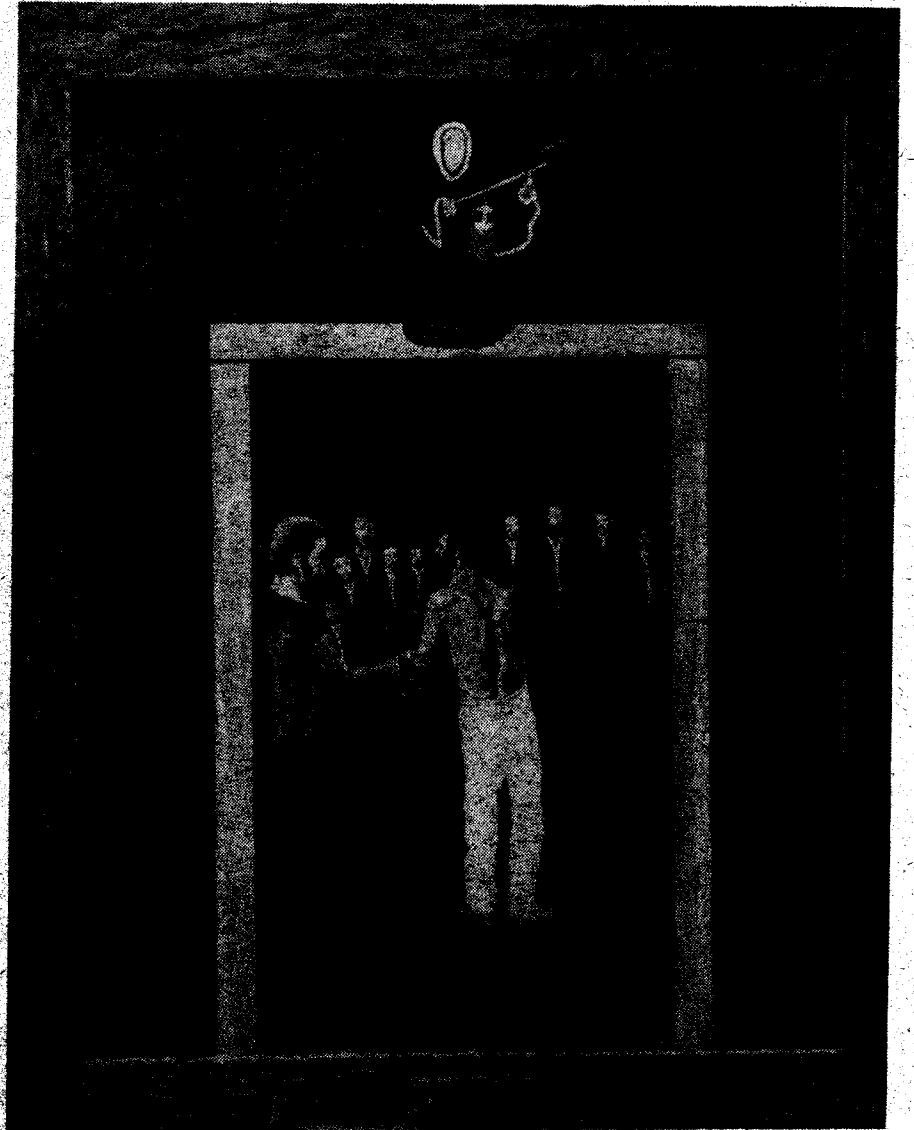
After Adlemann resigned as Festival director, board members invited some other artists. So the selection process involved both jurying and invitation. In some cases, the artwork being shown was selected by a Festival official, and in others, the artist decided which piece to exhibit.

Nevertheless, despite administrative instability and confusion among the public, a lot of good work was selected and hung, and one of the show's strong points is the appearance of several fresh meteors as well as the work of some solid stars. Noting them in many categories, starting with abstract work, there is first Bill Shepherd's piece: "Black Rock, Red Stick."

His examinations of underwater rocks cross the bridge from realism to abstraction with the inclusion of a red-orange shimmery pole in the canvas center, which dissolves into swirling water. The overall effect is a kind of gently controlled turmoil, painted very beautifully. Another abstract painter, Joel Bennett, uses lots of pastel paints to put down a variety of rounded shapes on a large canvas.

Joe Atteberry, Frank Ettenberg and Irene Schie have created some fascinating abstracts with a variety of media. For example, Atteberry stretched translucent rawhide over six small square frames to create an alluring piece called "May-December-Paul."

Among outstanding figurative painting is August Kaiser's portrait of an old cowhand on a ranch in the late afternoon, painted with a touch of indebtedness to Cezanne and Taos School painters. The atmospheric conditions are very effectively rendered.



Fred Vigil: One of the 'Penitente' series, at the Salon

Using a methodical arrangement of brush strokes, Jim Wood's young female figure in "Walking on the Moon" falls across the canvas in a gesture that is both bizarre and humorous. The absence of gravity as we know it has altered our perceptions. Amy R. Stein directs most of her interest to developing the facial features of the young woman she portrays in charcoal. The rest of the

paper contains gestural marks that make the figure seem as if she is reclining in an environment filled with ribbons and paraphernalia.

There is also much fine figurative sculpture by Allan Heuser, Pat Niblack, Larry T. DesJarlais Jr., Bob Hazonous, Glynn Gomez and James Roybal.

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# Armory the Best of the Festival

By WENDY WILSON

The 1980 Armory/Museum/Festival Show, juried by Dianne Vanderlip, curator of contemporary art at the Denver Art Museum, is the most exciting show of the current Festival of the Arts, and if one can begin to probe the rationale behind the selection of work, it would appear that the major

value was placed on natural expression, and that anything pretentious or overstated was ruled out. It is also evident that while artistic technique was important in the Biennial selection at Sweeney Center, it was not so important in the Armory show, which is on view through Oct. 19 at 1050 Old Pecos Trail.

The Armory show includes pieces that are both rough and refined, from the

utterly solemn perfection of Paul Becker's "Cotton Kimonos" and Doug Johnson's landscape, painted in casein with the preciousness and craftsmanship of Persian miniatures, to James Cogswell's "Mandate," in cardboard, cloth, paint and rough wood, or Bill Gilbert's "Collapse," a dozen homey adobe slabs leaning up against one another like a domino game.

Unlike the Salon show, where the art was more polite and the images devised to be accessible or understandable to the general public, the Armory offerings appear to be the work of artists working out their own individuality or dealing with more complex art ideas. Hence, one sees many abstract pieces at the Armory, roughly 44 artists working in a non-objective mode, as opposed to six realists, six out of a total 122 artists in the show. (However, a memorial for the fine realist landscape painter Arthur Haddock, who died in June 1980, was also mounted.) Some 29 other artists in the show work in a style identified as imaginative or decorative realism, and photography also is included.

Another characteristic of the Armory show, which has been masterfully hung by Art Thomas, is the inclusion of

experimental work, such as Steina Vasulka's video piece, a revolving machine with two cameras and two revolving mirrors, which produces an everchanging panoramic view of the room on two video sets. Another work is a set of four black and white Xerox compositions, a collage of blue jeans and blue work shirts, by James Dietsch, called "Untitled."

There are in the Armory works many more direct and indirect references to technology such as Xerox machines, computers and videos, than there are references to landscapes or figures. Dwayne Maxwell's acrylic dots on an 8-by-8-foot unstretched canvas, treated with rhoplex and entitled "Green and Purple," looks like a computer programming card. Margi Scharff's piece, an 18-by-16-inch plexiglass construction with two revolving boxes containing copper thread, calls to mind an aesthetic version of Ma Bell's technological transmitter office.

Much of the abstract work is a variation on field painting compositions, with random marks all over the canvas which are organized by some minimal

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Paul Becker: 'Cotton Kimono,' at the Armory