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Tape, hair, salt all part of unique art exhibit

'Fever Pitch: New Work from the Center for Emerging Visual Artists' at the Delaware Art Museum

By CHRISTOPHER YASIEJKO, The News Journal

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Long strands of black hair scribble the wall to the left of the steps leading to Gallery 10 at the Delaware Art Museum. They were not pulled from the head of the Brooklyn artist Andrea Cote, although her body is the medium she most often taps for installations and performances.

Rivulets of black paint hold the artificial clumps to the wall, turn the corner and continue up another wall, finally ending their vinelike sprawl on an I-beam above.

Hers isn't the first work you'll see at "Fever Pitch: New Work from the Center for Emerging Visual Artists" -- three photographs from Amy Stevens' "Confections" series, which recalls with bright colors and drizzling sugars her fumbling experience with a cake-decorating kit upon her 30th birthday, line a wall just outside the gallery's entrance -- but Cote's installation is the most curious visual introduction to an exhibit that can engage visitors without ostracizing those who fear not getting it.

The CFEVA, the museum's Philadelphia-based collaborative partner for the exhibit, is a nonprofit organization that supports artists who have degrees in the arts but no dealer representation. About 18 artists, all of them current or former fellows, contributed about three dozen works to "Fever Pitch."

The pieces in the collection, curated by Heather Campbell Coyle, command attention, and not only because of the diversity of media. (Artists used traditional oils and egg tempera, but also, among other things, packaging tape, plastic and salt.) Many of the works in the spacious gallery were produced with such detail and ingenuity that it's difficult to imagine anyone being able to fully appreciate them with a visit of less than a couple of hours.

That shouldn't dissuade you from stopping by before it ends on March 4, though. When "Fever Pitch" closes, Binod Shrestha's "Mandala" will be swept away from its low 8-by-8-foot platform in the center of the gallery. Shrestha, a Philadelphia sculptor (CFEVA artists are based anywhere from Baltimore to New York City), arranged gleaming white salt in a perfect square and, using an enlarged cutout of his own fingerprint, used red dye to render his unique pattern in the center.

Gone, too, will be Jeffrey Stockbridge's large-format photographs made in abandoned Philadelphia homes. Each print is the size of a wall poster with a deep resolution. Stockbridge's use of natural light in mostly dark settings works well with the realism of his prints, which feature found objects (some of which are encased near the photographs) that suggest former residents hurriedly moved away.

Displayed nearby are pieces by Jill Greenberg, a former photographer for the Philadelphia Inquirer who in "Fever Pitch" shares art created from the clear plastic casings of household items such as hairbrushes, connected by the tiny plastic strands that stubbornly secure price tags to clothing. In "Neither Fish nor Flesh," she presents a mermaid that reminded Campbell Coyle, who specializes in late 19th- and early 20th-century art with a focus on John Sloan, of Howard Pyle's "The Mermaid," part of the museum's permanent collection.

Steven Fishman's two works include a modular rocket suspended upside down beneath a rainbow-colored umbrella with lollipops adorning the warhead. (He provided extra lollipops, Campbell Coyle says, in case enterprising children sample the art.) His other contribution is an intentionally useless contraption made from the parts of several items he bought at Ikea, a commercial bastion of practical style. (It calls to mind an episode of "The Simpsons" in which Homer's futile attempt at assembling a grill inadvertently gives him artistic credibility.)

Ben Schwab's "Poplar" is the most imposing piece -- actually, it merges four canvas pieces into one 240-inch-wide, 90-inch-tall panoramic view of composite Philadelphia rooftops. Schwab, whose charcoal study of "Poplar" is on an adjacent wall, has a knack for recreating

depth. Viewed from a comfortable distance, "Poplar," which is vibrant for a cityscape thanks largely to its blue sky, makes it easy to imagine leaping from rooftop to rooftop.

There is more, far more, to explore than there is space here to describe. Don't miss the three works of Mark Khaisman, a Ukrainian-born Philadelphian who arranged layers of packaging tape to depict scenes of film noir on lightboxes. He rendered the details by crinkling and folding the tape.

Xiaoqing Ding's egg-tempera-on-panel paintings fit Campbell Coyle's description as "blending tradition and innovation" - Ding, born in Beijing, deftly fuses traditional Asian techniques and mythology with a modern sensibility. Mahtab Aslani's oil-on-canvas illustrations of women's undergarments depict the patterns and colors their names suggest - "Pink Plums" and "Lime Floral," for example - with a realism that makes it easy to mistake them for photographs.

And Lillian Bayley's "Democracy Dominoes," which is situated near two paintings that also reflect her thoughts about the United States' current foreign relations, appears simpler than it is. On each domino that stands in a circle, waiting to fall, she carved and painted the outlines of two countries in the Middle East.

As with many of the works in "Fever Pitch," whose modernity is a departure for a museum with a focus on treasured collections of significance to art history, it's worth a closer look.

Through March 4. Delaware Art Museum, 2301 Kentmere Parkway, Wilmington. Gallery 10. \$10, 60 and older \$8, college students \$5, ages 7-17 \$3, 6 and younger free. 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Tuesdays-Saturdays, 12-4 p.m. Sundays (free to all). 571-9590, www.delart.org.

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