



Pelle Cass's "Cypress Field" is a photograph of just a few women in an exposure shot that looks like many women playing.

A full spectrum

Diversity of ideas, styles on display in New England Biennial exhibit at Danforth

By Mark Feeney

GLOBE STAFF

FRAMINGHAM — Philip Prodger and Barbara O'Brien, the jurors for the Danforth Museum of Art's "New England Photography Biennial 2009," sorted through more than 1,000 submissions before arriving at the 72 images that make up the show. It runs through Nov. 8.

"I was deeply struck by the energy welling up from every corner of New England in photography," writes Prodger, who's curator of photography at the Peabody Essex Museum, in a juror's statement.

One form that energy takes is sheer diversity. The very nearly hilarious starkness of Daniel Coury's "Untitled," which places four pieces of hard candy cut in half shown against a bare back-

ground, is as different from the glorious visual cacophony of Pelle Cass's "Cypress Field" as the uses of water are in Ivana George's "Boston 2200 A.D." and Katherine McVety's "Canoe at Great Meadows." George manipulates her image to show a global-warming cityscape, in which Boston Harbor has inundated much of the skyline. McVety, with rich yet subtle colors, presents a bit of creek meandering through

empty landscape.

It's always tempting (and almost always a mistake) to discern trends in biennials. One of the satisfactions of the Danforth show is how Prodger and O'Brien have resisted the temptation to be exclusive on the basis of any principle other than simple visual interest. A viewer is as likely to encounter photographs of Afghanistan (one each from Kabul and Kandahar, by Paula

Lerner) as of a teenager's personal space in Brookline or Winchester (Rania Matar's "A Girl and Bedroom" series). In content, there's nothing parochial about the Biennial. Louisiana, France, and Coney Island are here, along with Concord, the Cape, the Common, and multiple points between.

The ever-growing prevalence of color in serious photography has been going on so long that

PHOTOGRAPHY REVIEW

NEW ENGLAND PHOTOGRAPHY BIENNIAL 2009

At: the Danforth Museum of Art, 123 Union Ave., Framingham, through Nov. 8. Call 508-620-0050 or go to www.danforthmuseum.org.

"trend" long ago ceased to apply. Only a third of the photographs here are in black and white. Yet that doesn't indicate a diminution in the documentary impulse. There are very few staged or manipulated images here — and most of them ape the appearance of reality. The deadpan faux-ness of the two pictures from Alexia Mellor's "Extending the Skies" series makes them that much funnier. It takes a close look at Cass's "Cypress Field" to notice that what looks like one exposure of many young women playing with footballs is, in fact, several exposures of just a few young women. Almost all the pictures are shot more or less straightforwardly. That said, one of the few that isn't, Suzanne Revy's "Small Wonders, Swim Lesson," which is shot from above, is all the more revealing for its life-guard's-eye view.

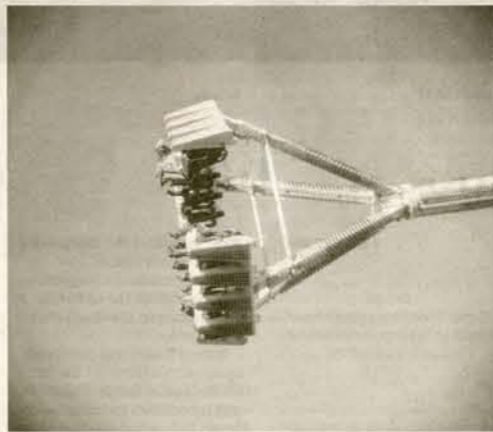
Another temptation of juried shows is to look for influences. Brian Kaplan's "Blank Billboard #8 (Route 9)," with its spooky expanse of rectilinear whiteness aglow with mystery and veiled revelation, inevitably recalls Hiroshi Sugimoto's long exposures of movie screens. The luscious decay captured in two examples here of David Caras's "Power of Cuba" series, with its remarkable gradations of color and texture, conjures up the no less opulent sense of collapse in Robert Polidori's images of Havana.

Isa Leshko's "The Claw, Topsfield Fair" and "Flying, Topsfield Fair," which she shot with an inexpensive plastic camera, make of amusement park rides Constructivist artifacts. As for Jordan Kessler's two views of Oklahoma, they could be just-north cousins of Frank Gohlke's Texas landscapes.

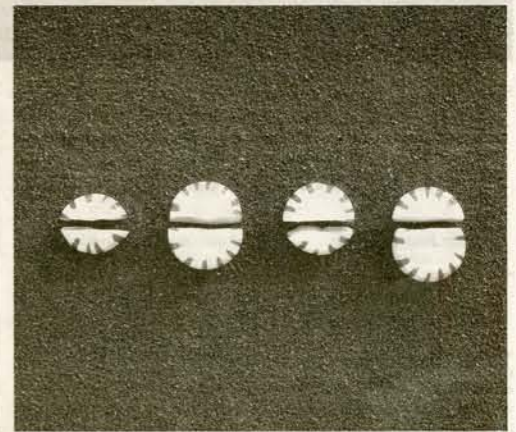
During the 1970s, Gohlke was part of the New Topographics movement of landscape photography. O'Brien, who formerly edited Art New England and oversaw Simmons College's Trustman Art Gallery, notes the



Among the diverse images are (clockwise from top) Mori Insinger's colorful "Rowayton, Connecticut"; Daniel Coury's "Untitled" photo of hard candy; and Isa Leshko's photo of a carnival ride, titled "The Claw, Topsfield Fair."



affinity between Mori Insinger's work and the movement. Insinger has three pictures in the Biennial, all of them marked by his exacting eye for composition. They're clean and direct, with a vivid yet very controlled use of color. Note the cornflower-blue shutters on the house in the



middle of Insinger's "Rowayton, Connecticut," and the way they accent the much paler blue of the clapboards.

Insinger is one of the Biennial's two Purchase Prize winners. The other is Meredith Miller. She draws her inspiration from painters, but inspiration should not be

narrowly construed. A nude, "Untitled (Diana After Balthus)," has a voluptuousness that's far from Balthusian. Inspiration of a different sort gets paid especially lustrous tribute in Trisha Barry's "Factory Early Morning Light." Our culture long ago came to take photography so much for

granted that we overlook that the ultimate inspiration for all photography — its source, really — isn't found in visual art, whether painting or other photographs, but in literal illumination.

Mark Feeney can be reached at mfeeney@globe.com.