

College

By KYLE HUGHES

What would you call leech-shaped patches of black macadam laid on a hillside, patches small enough to be pieces of curbing for an uncompleted parking lot but big enough to grab your attention while driving by?

Or what would you call a squat building with no door and square holes in the walls, the only clue to its purpose being cryptic graffiti painted on its black exterior?

The answer in both cases is art. More specifically, art currently on display along the entrance road to Bennington College.

The macadam patches sitting on hillsides adjoining the college drive comprise a work called "Penbroke" by artist Rudy Serra.

The unusual building, called "Power House for Adam Smith," is by Rutgers University professor Lauren Ewing. The artwork is concerned with the American silk industry. And it is not unique to its installation site at Bennington — an exact duplicate building is on display in the New Museum in New York City.

Both works were done at the college this summer, and are examples of art works that can't be easily pigeon-holed. And because of this, they are wide open to cries of "Fraud!"

Most people's reaction to the works, if they have any reaction at all beside passing curiosity, is likely to be negative because of their uniqueness.

"Are they going to burn it down or tear it down?" asked one recent Bennington College graduate of Ms. Ewing's building.

Another person, a hitchhiker I gave a ride to, solemnly told me that Serra's "Penbroke" landscape terrace installations were "pedestals" for outdoor sculpture yet to be erected,

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showcases unique works of six artists



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One of artist Rudy Serra's macadams lies on a Bennington College hillside.

which does make a sort of fractured sense: they're pedestals for the fields they sit in, making us notice them (and their pedestals).

Serra and Ms. Ewing are two of six artists whose work is being shown at the college through mid-October. The other works are housed indoors at Usdan Gallery in the Visual and Performing Arts building.

The quality of the show varies from Serra's work (which can't really be appreciated without stopping your car and walking out to the middle of the field and looking around) to Alan Scarritt's wall drawing, "Extending My Reach," which may be a joke.

Scarritt stood in a corner of the gallery and drew on the wall with a black pencil. The program notes on the exhibition claims Scarritt's scribbles

expose "the myth of the gallery or museum as a neutral container for art."

Scarritt has also devised a "sound-work" to be heard in conjunction with looking at "Extending My Reach."

In the exhibition, there are also models for a giant circular road that artist Vladamir Urban would like to see built in the desert out West. The road would only be visible in its entirety from a satellite, according to the program notes.

People on the ground would apparently only see a big macadam road going nowhere built in the middle of the desert.

"Suspended between image and diagram, its two halves circle endlessly, onanistically about their vacant centers, twin emblems of frustrated desire," is how the notes describe Urban's model for "Daroga."

Also on display in the gallery is an eight-piece floor sculpture by Heide Fasnacht called "Aperture," which invites spectators to wheel its movable pieces around the room, and attractive paintings on shaped canvas by Vivien Abrams.

But, of course, the two works that have, because of their location, attracted the most attention are Serra's macadam and Ms. Ewing's building.

I still don't quite get the point of Ms. Ewing's building — the program notes by Craig Owens allude to it being some kind of negative comment on capitalism — but my opinion of Serra's macadam has changed since I first saw it while driving through the college.

I remember wondering then in mild curiosity just what exactly that was supposed to be. Walking through the field one

day, however, to get a closer look at a couple of the pieces, I thought perhaps Serra's intentions were more modest than one might first suspect: that "Penbroke" was only what it appeared to be, a pleasant man-made conceit on the landscape.

But what does it all mean, is the inevitable question. According to Owens' notes, "all this work manifests a common intention: to expand aesthetic practice beyond the narrow categories to which it has been consigned for centuries. This makes it particularly appropriate to Bennington College, which has always been identified with an avant-garde spirit of experimentation in the arts."

If you haven't seen it, it's worth a trip out there, if only to see what Bennington College has been up to lately.

Buttons plan to continue since