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AROUND THE GALLERIES

New vistas in landscape painting

The natural landscape isn't what it used to be. Neither is landscape painting. "Groundwork," the aptly titled inaugural exhibition at D.E.N. Contemporary Art, consists of mixed-media images by eight artists whose heads are filled with digital info yet whose hearts are drawn to the pleasures of plein-air painting.

Isabel Manalo and Tim Forcum abstract shapes from nature. Their canvases suggest a world that has been digitally transmitted, its components all the more romantic for being elusive.

Michael Napper and Fran Siegel make the most atmospheric works. Using oil, pencil and raw pigment, Napper coaxes sensuous vistas out of thin air. Siegel encases fragments of Mylar, monofilament and silver beads in shallow Plexiglas boxes mounted on the wall. Using a mixture of mica, wax and acrylic, she paints translucent swirls on the boxes' interiors and exteriors, creating self-contained reliefs that recycle sunlight by reflecting it every which way.



D.E.N. Contemporary Art

ROMANTIC: "What Stirs Before Our Eyes" by Tim Forcum; his canvases suggest a world that has been digitally transmitted.

Map-making and field research are evoked by the remaining works. Noriko Ambe's carefully cut and stacked sheets of translucent paper neatly transform contour maps into 3-D reliefs. Brandon Morse's computer-generated video, projected on the floor and walls of a darkened back room, flattens clouds and cellular structures into two-dimensional grids of distinct pixels.

Earthy textures fill Leyla Cardenas' fragile pieces. Like a detective dusting for fingerprints, she paints thin coats of acrylic resin on ordinary surfaces. When the quick-drying medium forms a skin, she peels it off, mounts it on pins and arranges the fragments in tasteful compositions on the gallery wall and floor.

Shona Macdonald's modest gouaches depict snowflakes,

trees and tiny horizon-lines that crisscross a page like cracks in a window. These lovely studies nudge Realism into the background as they bring abstract patterns and decorative flourishes to the forefront.

"Groundwork" is a sensible show that does what it says and even more.

D.E.N. Contemporary Art, 6023 Washington Blvd., Culver City, (310) 559-3023, through Feb. 26. Closed Sundays and Mondays.

By DAVID PAGEL
Special to The Times