

Double Vision

By Patricia C. Johnson

Many of this year's ArtHouston offerings are disheartening eye candy. From the joopy, highly stylized paintings on paper by Nina Boyasso at Inman Gallery to Karen Beall's delectable but meaningless jellyfish at Moody Gallery, there's little to sink one's mental teeth into.

Style seems to dominate. Jeremy Red, a young painter and former student of North Texas art guru Vernon Fisher, shows disjointed paintings at McMurtrey Gallery. His compositions are like collages with paint blocks of primary color, cute line drawings reminiscent of a coloring book and works in a child's handwriting. A deliberate casualness of execution supplants expressive honesty.

The photographs by Elizabeth Dondis at Hooks-Epstein would seem more at home in the pages of Martha Stewart Living. The glossy color photographs by Dan Wainberg, a passionate collector and traveler exhibiting at Robert McClain & Co are at heart high-resolution pictures perfect for a travel magazine and less perfect for a gallery of fine art. In these examples, the boundary between art and commerce, which has always been vague, appears unequivocally crossed. If such demarcations seem old fashioned, they are important nonetheless; for if everything is art, nothing is art.

However, one photography exhibit among the 14 ArtHouston shows sampled last week held the mind's eye and saved the day.

At John Cleary Gallery, the focus is on elegant compositions by David Fokos. His black-and-white images are crystalline, formal compositions of unexceptional views made remarkable through craft and angle of vision. Fokos' long exposures, ranging from 20 seconds to 10 minutes, filter everything but the underlying forms and patterns. Missing Rail and Wooley Reservoir exemplify the photographer's visual distillation. The first is a

panorama of a distant horizon where a glassy ocean meets a silken sky. The photograph places us in the lower left corner, on the small piece of terrace or bridge where the photographer stood to shoot. From here we see not only the liquid space in front but the tubular railing of the title. It cuts across at an angle in front of us, its clean, curving lines as graphic as ink on paper.

In Wooley Reservoir, a sharp horizon divides an ample field of short grasses from a flat sky. The monotonal expanse is rent by sculptural copse of trees, a dark and dense silhouette right of center. It offers, like the railing in Missing Rail, a doorway into a calm, meditative dimension.