Salon Should Have Been Better

By WENDY WILSON

This is the show that has no right to be so good. So says Robert E. Ewing, a former Festival of the Arts director and executive director of the Denver Art Museum, the institution that is the most exciting show of the current Festival of the Arts, and if one can begin to probe the rationale behind the inclusion of work in the Armory show, it would appear that the major

selecting work was as changeable as the clucking chickens.

Last spring, the Festival office sent a letter to all artists in last year's Invitational show who live in Santa Fe County, and the letter said that Ewing and Jan Adlemann, the Festival's director, would visit their studios and select a piece for the Armory show. This process was then amended, when advertise- ments in city newspapers invited any Santa Fe County artist to bring slides or original works to two showings at the Inn at Loretto, at which time Adlemann would select additional work.

After Adlemann resigned as Festival director, board members invited some other artists. So the selection process involved jurying and invitation. In some cases, the artwork being shown was selected by a Festival official, and in others, the artist decided which piece to exhibit.

Nevertheless, despite administrative instability in the Armory's selection process, the public, a lot of good work was selected and hung, and one of the show's strong points is the appearance of several fresh young artists as well as the work of some solid stars. Noting them in many categories, starting with abstract work, there is first a Paul Backer's piece: "Black Rock, Red Stick."

His examiners of underwater rocks cress the bridge from realism to abstraction with the inclusion of a red-orange shimmering polychrome canvas center, which includes a swirling water maelstrom, the seed of gently controlled turmoil, painted very beautifully. Another abstract painter, Jean Bennis, uses lots of optical tricks to put down a variety of round shapes on a large canvas.

Joe Astendberg, Frank Etseng and Irene Schie have created some fascinating abstracts with a variety of media. For example, Astendberg stretched translucent rawhide over six small square frames to create an alluring piece called "May-December-Paul."

Animalistic figurative painting is August Kaser's portrait of an old beaver on a ranch in the late afternoon, painted with a touch of led to the viewer's perception of the artist's style and the artist's interest in developing the facial features of the young woman he portrays in charcoal. The rest of the paper contains getactic marks that make the figure seem as if she is reclining in an environment filled with ribbons and paraphernalia.

There is also much fine figurative sculpture by Allen Houser, Pat Nickolas, Larry T. Dean-Jr., Bob Hassan, Glynn James and James Reybold.

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Armory the Best of the Festival

By WENDY WILSON

The 1980 Armory/Museum/Festival Show, juried by Dianne Vanderlip, curator of contemporary art at the Denver Art Museum, is the most exciting show of the current Festival of the Arts, and if one can begin to probe the rationale behind the inclusion of work in the Armory show, it would appear that the major

value was placed on natural expression, and that anything pretentious or over-"decorated" was ruled out. It is also evident that while artistic technique was important in the Biennial selection at Sweeney Center, it was not so important in the Armory show, which is on view through Oct. 19 at 1060 Old Pecos Trail.

The Armory show is also one that is both rough and refined, from the utterly solemn perfection of Paul Beken's "Cotton Kimono" and Doug Johnson's landscape, painted in cases with the preoccupations of craft and the mannerisms of Persian miniatures, to James Cogswell's "Mandala," in cardboard, cloth, paint and rough wood, or Bill Gilbert's "Collapses," a dozen honeycomb shapes leaning up against one another like a domino game.

Unlike the Salon show, where the artist was more polite and the imagery devised to be accessible or understandable to the general public, the Armory offerings appear to be the work of artists working out their own individuality or dealing with more complex art ideas. Hence, one sees many abstract pieces in the Armory, roughly 44 artists working in a non-objective mode, as opposed to six realists, six out of a total 122 artists in the show. (However, a memorial for the fine realist landscape painter Arthur Haddock, who died in June 1980, was also mounted."

Some 39 other artists in the show work in a style identified as imaginative or decorative realism, and photography also is included.

Another characteristic of the Armory show, which has been masterfully hung by Art Thomas, is the inclusion of experimental work, such as Steina Vasula's video piece, a revolving machine with two cameras and two revolving mirrors, which produces an ever-changing panoramic view of the room on two video sets. Another work is a set of four black and white Xerox compositions, a collage of blue jeans and blue work shirt, by James Dietz, called "Untitled."

There are in the Armory works many more direct and indirect references to technology such as Xerox machines, computers and video, than there are references to landscapes or figures. Diane's acrylic dots on an 8-by-8-foot unstretched canvas, treated with rhiopex and entitled "Green and Purple," goes like a computer programming card. Margi Scharf's piece, a 16-by-16-inch Plexiglas construction with two revolving boxes containing copper, calls to mind an aesthetic version of Ma Bell's technological transmitter of the future.

Much of the abstract work is a variation on field painting compositions, with random marks all over the canvas which are organized by some minimal [Continued on page 38].