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15 Group Shows Not to Miss

By Roberta Smith

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GROUP SHOW AS TRIAL BALLOON

Group shows are often a chance for art galleries to expand or redirect their focus. This happens subtly at the Kate Werble Gallery in SoHo. In the well-named show “*Quiet Tremors*,” the gallery’s somewhat Minimalist aesthetic is maintained, but this is the first time in its six-year history that the gallery has featured paintings. Just as subtly, the show makes a good case for that understated, overtouted abstract painting based on unusual materials or processes. William Latta uses painting and polymer to form dark, bulging surfaces that are muscular and lavalike. Ulrike Müller fashions her small, gleaming geometries from baked enamel on steel. Davide Balula makes textured tondos by alternately soaking in water and drying out factory-primed linen until its white coating starts flaking off. Alison Hall, Kristen Van Deventer and David Schutter further enlarge the gallery’s purview. (83 Vandam Street, near Hudson Street, through Feb. 21)

Similarly, Invisible-Exports, on the Lower East Side, abandons its usual program of envelope-pushers like Genesis Breyer P-Orridge, Ron Athey and Kenneth Anger, in this case to tack toward slightly more conventional waters. Or so it seems. “*Fetching Blemish*,” a selection of eccentric self-portraits by nine artists, is hung salon-style on a single wall with an initially charming effect that soon palls. Strange and unsettling depictions abound. This applies to Dan McCarthy’s ghostly ceramic variations on smiley faces, Amy Sedaris’s ghoulish setup photographs and Rebecca Morgan’s remorselessly detailed self-caricatures, one of which is a painting titled “*Self-Portrait at Thirty Living in My Hometown, Post Big Mac Meal*.” At the center of all this hangs “*Nicoles*,” a drawing from the 1990s