

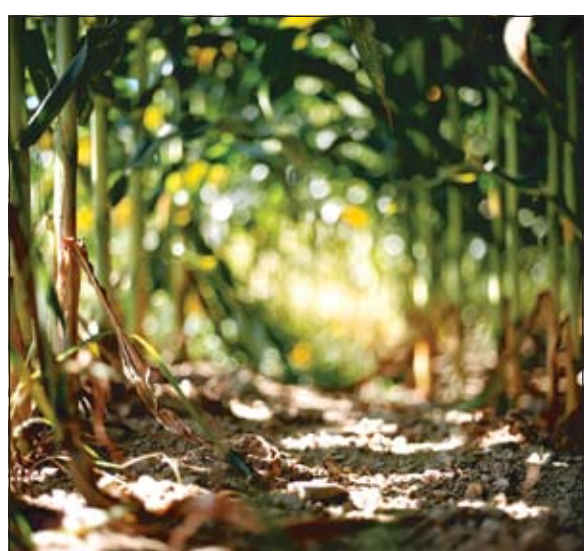
ART

THE BEST OF THE NORTHEAST

SILVERMINE AWARDS ARTISTS IN ANNUAL SHOW



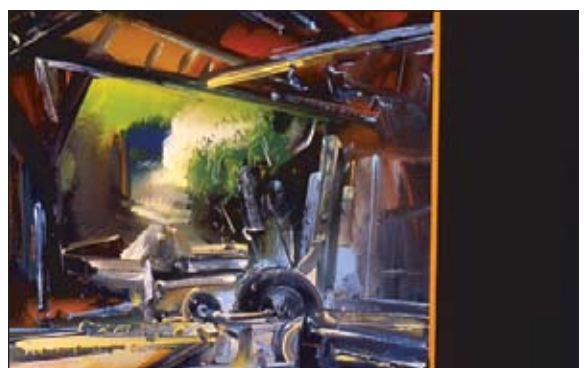
Pulse by Stephen Remick.



N41 46.748' W073 50.793' 9/6/04' by Torrance York.



"Genesis System" by John Keefe.



"Outside Sawmill" by David Brewster.

By Abby Luby

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

The best thing about "Art of the Northeast," Silvermine Art Guild's 58th yearly competitive art derby, is seeing a diverse cross-section of contemporary artists in the same space at the same time. The current show, on view through June 8, has much photography, several realism works and a few

REVIEW

sculptures. Missing is abstract and abstract expressionism.

Is it that area artists no longer create abstract works? Last year, at least a half-dozen abstract paintings were included in this yearly show. If "Art of the Northeast" is any indication of what artists are collectively creating, then there seems to

Please see **SILVERMINE**, Page D4



"The Boardwalk" by Debra Schaffer.

Contributed photos



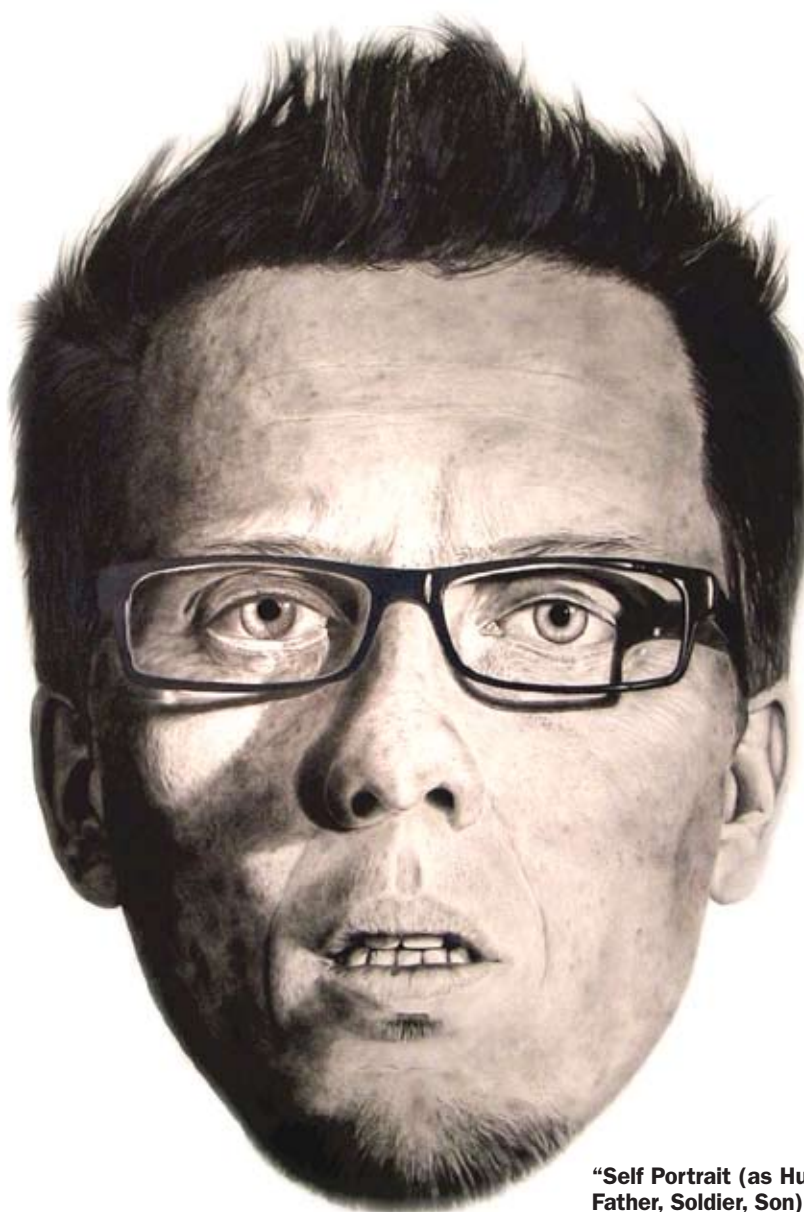
"Geminis Ascending" by Marilyn Clements, Judith Steinberg and Barbara Rothenberg.



"Riding Train 7" by David and Max Dunlop.



"Well Lit Tree" by Christopher Gardner.



"Self Portrait (as Husband, Father, Soldier, Son)" by Paul Kaiser.



"Exposed Negative #2" by Jay Brodsky.



"Big Baby Day" by Barbara O'Shea.



"Cranes & Smog Over Shanghai" by Carol Dixon.

MAKING THE ART SEEN

ADMISSION TO EVENTS FREE UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED.

Museums & Nonprofit Venues

THE ALDRICH CONTEMPORARY ART MUSEUM Arturo Herrera: **Castles, Dwarfs, and Happychaps** Imagery from children's books and other popular culture sources create a hybrid of works that are familiar and foreign. Through Sept. 2. **The Photograph as Canvas** Explores the technique of making images on the surface of photographs. Through June 10. **David Abir: Tekrar** Sound installation intended to develop an emotional and physical experience from a piece of music. Through June 10. **W(E)AVE** Recent projects by Elena Herzog and Michael Schumacher. Through June 10. **Kysa Johnson: Blow up 73 — the Spores of White Oak, Pine, American Elm and Red Maple** Chalk-on-blackboard drawing of spores native to Connecticut. Through June 10. **Dario Robleto: Chrysanthemum Anthems** Solo exhibition of sculpture. Through June 10. \$7, \$4 for seniors and college students; free for members, children 18 and younger, kindergarten through 12th-grade teachers and all visitors on Tuesdays. Tuesday-Sunday, noon-5 p.m. Closed New Year's Day, Thanksgiving and Christmas. 258 Main St., Ridgefield. 438-4519 or www.aldrichart.org.

THE BARNUM MUSEUM Grand Adventure: A Celebration of the American Spirit in Bridgeport One-hundred-year-old museum showcases the life and times of Barnum, General Tom Thumb, Lavinia Warren and Jenny Lind; an Egyptian mummy named Pa-Ib; and a 1,000-square-foot scale model of a five-ring circus. Permanent exhibit. **P.T. Barnum: Bethel to Broadway to Bridgeport** Guides visitors through Barnum's life and career, from his hometown of Bethel, through his American Museum on Broadway and his later years living in Bridgeport. Permanent exhibit. \$5, \$4 for seniors and students, \$3 for children 4-17; free for children younger than 4 and members. Tuesday-Saturday, 10 a.m.-4:30 p.m.; Sunday, noon-4:30 p.m. 820 Main St., Bridgeport. 331-1104 or www.barnum-museum.org.

BRUCE MUSEUM Fakes and Forgeries: The Art of Deception More than 50 examples of fakes of Western painting and sculpture from the Middle Ages to the modern era. Through Sept. 9. **Changes in Our Land** Permanent display of the region's environmental and historical development. **Photography from the Bruce Museum Collection** More than 100 photographs by leading 20th-century photographers. Through May 27. **Weaving a Collection: Native American Baskets from the Bruce Museum** Explores five geographic regions of basketry: the Northeast, Great Plains, Southwest, California and Northwest. Through June 1. **Zip, Bop and Whir: Toys of the 20th Century** Favorite toys from the 1900s. Through July 8. Paintings by more than 20 artists, including William Merritt Chase, Joseph DeCamp, Daniel Garber, Child Hassam, Willard Metcalf, Theodore Robinson, John Singer Sargent, Robert Spencer, John H. Twachtman and J. Alden Weir. \$7, \$6 for seniors and children 5-12; free to children younger than 5. Tuesday-Saturday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; Sunday, 1-5 p.m. 1 Museum Drive, Greenwich. 869-0376 or www.brucemuuseum.org.

THE DISCOVERY MUSEUM A science museum, featuring high-definition movies, hands-on activities and daily planetarium shows. \$8.50; \$7 for children, seniors and students; free for children younger than 5 and members. Tuesday-Saturday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; Sunday, noon-5 p.m. 4450 Park Ave., Bridgeport. 372-3521 or www.discoverymuseum.org.

FLORENCE GRISWOLD MUSEUM The Circle of Friends Works by artists of the Florence Griswold House. Through July 1. In addition to the original 1817 Griswold House, where the artists of the Lyme art colony lived, the museum features a contemporary riverfront gallery, education center, historic gardens

Please see **ART SEEN**, Page D8

OPENINGS

ADMISSION TO EVENTS FREE UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED.

Special Event

BRUCE MUSEUM 22nd Annual Bruce Museum Outdoor Crafts Festival Works by more than 80 exhibitors, available for purchase. \$7, free for members and children younger than 5. Saturday and May 20, 11 a.m.-5 p.m. 1 Museum Drive, Greenwich. 869-0376 or www.brucemuuseum.org.

Openings

ABBY M. TAYLOR FINE ART LLC Abstraction American and European Art in the Twentieth Century. Friday through June 18. Monday-Friday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; Saturday, 11 a.m.-5 p.m. 43 Greenwich Ave., Greenwich. 622-0906 or www.amtfineart.com.

DOWNTOWN NEW CANAAN Art in the Windows Works by 40 artist members from the Carriage Barn Arts Center in Waveny Park displayed in the windows of 40 stores. Tuesday through May 25. Elm, Main, Park and Forest streets, Morse Court and South Avenue. Call for hours. 972-1895 or www.carriagebarn.org.

MAMARONECK ARTISTS' GUILD Going Places New members show. Wednesday through June 2. Opening reception May 24, 5-7 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday, noon-5 p.m. 2120 Boston Post Road, Larchmont.

Please see **OPENINGS**, Page D7

Movie clock

Any inaccuracies in these listings may be the result of last-minute changes by the movie theaters.
SUNDAY, MAY 13

BEDFORD, N.Y.
Clearview's Bedford Playhouse, Route 22, 914-234-7300
The Hoax: 11:45, 2:15, 4:30, 7
Spider-Man 3: 11:15, 2:45, 6, 9

BETHEL
Bethel Cinema, 269 Greenwood Ave., 778-2100
Black Book: 12:45, 3:50, 6:45
Fracture: 1:25, 4:10, 7:10
The TV Set: 1:05, 3:05, 5:15, 7:20
The Valet: 12:55, 2:55, 4:55, 7

BRIDGEPORT
Showcase Cinemas, 286 Canfield Ave., 339-7171
28 Weeks Later: 12:15, 2:30, 4:45, 7:10, 9:55
Are We Done Yet? 11:20, 1:40, 7:20
Delta Farce: 11:15, 1:15, 3:20, 5:20, 7:30, 9:35
The Ex: 11:25, 1:30, 3:35, 5:40, 7:50, 9:55
Fracture: 12:55, 4:35, 7:25, 10:05
In the Land of Women: 12:20, 2:45, 5:15, 7:55, 10:10
Life in a ... Metro: 1, 4, 7, 10
Lucky You: 7:05, 9:45
Meet the Robinsons 3D: 11:30, 2:10, 4:30
Spider-Man: 11, noon, 12:30, 1, 2:15, 3:15, 3:45, 4:15, 5:30, 6:45, 7:15, 7:45, 9, 10, 10:30
Vacancy: 4:25, 9:40

DARIEN
Darien Playhouse, 1077 Post Road, 655-7655
Spider-Man 3: 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8

FAIRFIELD
Community Theatre, 1424 Post Road, 255-6255
300: 1, 4, 7
Amazing Grace: 1:30, 4:30, 7:30
Fairfield Cinemas, 41 Black Rock Turnpike, 339-7151
Blades of Glory: 12:10, 2:25, 4:35, 6:50, 9:15
Disturbia: 12:20, 2:45, 5:10, 7:40, 10:05
Georgia Rule: 1:20, 4, 7, 9:40
Hot Fuzz: 1:30, 4:10, 7:10, 9:55
Invisible: 12:05, 7:35
Namesake: 12:45, 3:40, 6:40, 9:30
Next: 2:30, 4:45, 10:20
Spider-Man 3: Noon, 12:30, 1, 3:15, 3:45, 4:15, 6:45, 7:15, 7:45, 10, 10:30

GREENWICH
Bow Tie Cinemas Plaza 3, 2 Railroad Ave., 869-4030
Fracture: 1:15, 4:15, 7:15, 9:40
In the Land of Women: 1:30, 4:30, 7:30, 9:50
Spider-Man 3: 1, 4, 7, 10

NEW CANAAN
Bow Tie Cinemas Playhouse, 89 Elm St., 966-0600
Fracture: 1:30, 4:30, 7:30
Spider-Man 3: 1, 4, 7

NORWALK
Bow Tie Cinemas Royale 6, 542 Westport Ave., 846-8797
Blades of Glory: 2:40, 7:30
The Ex: 12:50, 3:10, 5:10, 7:20, 9:30
Fracture: 1, 3:20, 6:45, 9:10
Georgia Rule: 12:40, 3:10, 7, 9:20
The Hoax: 2:30, 7:10
In the Land of Women: 12:20, 5, 9:40



Tobey Maguire stars in "Spider-Man 3."

© Columbia Pictures

Lucky You: 12:30, 2:50, 5:15, 7:40, 10
Next: 12:20, 5:30, 9:50
Bow Tie Cinemas SoNo Regent, 64 N. Main St., 899-7979
28 Weeks Later: 11:30, 2:15, 4:45, 7:10, 9:10
Delta Farce: 11:45, 2:30, 4:20, 6:50, 8:45
Disturbia: 1:15, 3:45, 6:30, 8:50
Hot Fuzz: 11:15, 1:45, 4:15, 6:45, 9:15
Spider-Man 3: 11, noon, 1, 1:30, 2, 3, 4, 4:30, 5, 6, 7, 7:30, 8, 9, 9:30
Garden Cinemas, 26 Isaac St., 838-4504
Black Book: 1:40, 4:30, 7:30
Lives of Others: 3:40, 8:30
The Namesake: 1:20, 3:50, 6:20, 8:50
Year of the Dog: 1:30, 6:30

IMAX Theater at Maritime Aquarium, 10 N. Water St., 852-0700
The Human Body: 11, 1, 3, 4, 7:30
Ocean Wonderland: 2
Whales: Noon

PLEASANTVILLE, N.Y.
Jacob Burns Film Center, 364 Manville Road, 914-747-5555
Away From Her: 12:05, 2:15, 5:10, 7:50
Black Book: 1, 4, 7
Dido and Aeneas: 7:45
Margot Fonteyn: Through the Eyes of Friends: 5
Wallace & Gromit in the Curse of the Were-Rabbit: Noon
War/Dance: 2:30

PORT CHESTER, N.Y.
Loews The Waterfront at Port Chester, 40 Westchester Ave., 914-510-1000
28 Weeks Later: 11:15, 1:45, 4:15, 7:15, 9:50
Delta Farce: 11:45, 2:15, 4:50, 7:05, 9:45
Disturbia: 11:50, 2:45, 5:25, 7:50, 10:25
The Ex: 11:20, 1:35, 4:10, 6:45, 9
Fracture: 11:05, 1:55, 5:05, 8:05, 10:40
Georgia Rule: 11:30, 2, 4:45, 7:45, 10:45
The Hoax: 2:25, 7:55

Hot Fuzz: 11:40, 5:15, 10:35
Lucky You: 7:20, 10:10
Meet the Robinsons: 11:10, 1:50, 4:20, 7:10, 9:40
Next: 11:35, 2:05, 4:55
Spider-Man 3: 11, noon, 12:30, 1, 1:30, 2:30, 3:30, 4, 4:30, 5, 6, 7, 7:30, 8, 8:30, 9:30, 10:30

RIDGEFIELD
The Ridgefield Playhouse, 80 East Ridge, 438-5795
Spider-Man 3: 1:30, 4:30, 7:30

RYE BROOK, N.Y.
Clearview's Rye Ridge Cinemas, Rye Ridge Shopping Center, 914-939-8177
Call for show times.

STAMFORD
Avon Theatre, 272 Bedford St., 967-3660
Black Book (Zwartboek): 1, 4, 7
The Valet: 12:40, 2:30, 4:20, 6:15, 8:10
Bow Tie Cinemas Landmark 9, 5 Landmark Square, 324-3100
28 Weeks Later: 1, 3:15, 5:30, 8, 10:20
Are We Done Yet? 1:30, 6:50
Delta Farce: 12:30, 2:45, 5, 7:30, 10
Disturbia: 12:10, 2:30, 5:15, 7:45, 10:15
The Ex: Noon, 2:15, 4:30, 7, 9:30
Hot Fuzz: 4, 9:10
In the Land of Women: 6:40, 9
The Invisible: 12:20, 2:40, 5:10, 7:40, 10:10
Kickin' It Old Skool: 1:50, 7:20
Lucky You: 1:15, 4:10, 7:10, 9:50
Meet the Robinsons: Noon, 2:10, 4:20
Perfect Stranger: 4:40, 9:45

Bow Tie Cinemas Majestic, 118 Summer St., 323-1690
Fracture: 1:30, 4:30, 7:30, 10:05
Georgia Rule: 1:15, 4:15, 7:15, 9:55
Spider-Man 3: 10, 11, noon, 12:30, 1, 2, 3, 3:35, 4, 5, 6, 6:35, 7, 8, 9, 9:35, 10
State Cinema, 990 Hope St., 325-0250
Disturbia: 4:30, 6:50, 9
Namesake: 4, 6:20, 8:50

TRUMBULL
Bow Tie Cinemas Marquis 16, 100 Quarry Road, 365-6500
28 Weeks Later: 11:30, 2, 4:45, 8:10, 10:20
Are We Done Yet?: 11:30, 2, 4:20, 6:30, 9
Blades of Glory: 6:50, 9:10
Delta Farce: 12:30, 2:45, 5:30, 8:10, 10:15
Disturbia: 1:30, 4:10, 7:10, 9:30
The Ex: 12:20, 2:40, 5, 7:10, 9:30
Fracture: 1:20, 4:20, 6:45, 9:20
Georgia Rule: 1:10, 4, 7:30, 10:10
Hot Fuzz: 1:30, 4:10, 7:20, 10
The Invisible: 12:45, 3:10, 5:30, 8, 10:10
Lucky You: 12:45, 3:40, 6:40, 9:20
Meet the Robinsons: 12:10, 2:20, 4:45
Next: 1:10, 4, 6:30, 9
Spider-Man 3: 11:15, noon, 1, 1:45, 2:30, 3:30, 4:30, 5:15, 6:20, 7, 7:45, 8:45, 9:45, 10:20

WHITE PLAINS, N.Y.
City Center 15 Cinema de Lux, 19 Mamaroneck Ave., 914-747-6000
28 Weeks Later: 11:35, 2:05, 4:30, 7:05, 9:45
Are We Done Yet? 11:10, 1:20, 6:50
Delta Farce: 12:10, 2:35, 4:50, 7:10, 9:40
Disturbia: 10:55, 1:25, 4:05, 6:40, 9:10
Eloise in Hollywood: 10 a.m.
The Ex: 11:40, 2:10, 4:35, 7, 9:20
Fracture: 10:40, 1:10, 3:55, 6:30, 9:05
Georgia Rule: 10:35, 1:15, 4, 6:55, 9:35
Hot Fuzz: 3:40, 9:15
The Invisible: 11:50, 2:30, 4:55, 7:40, 10:15
Lucky You: 12:15, 9:50
Next: 2:55, 5:10, 7:30
Spider-Man 3: 10:15, 10:35, 10:55, 11, 11:30, noon, 12:30, 1:30, 2:15, 2:45, 3:15, 3:45, 4:15, 4:45, 5:30, 6:15, 6:45, 7:15, 7:45, 8:15, 9, 9:30, 10, 10:30

WILTON
Bow Tie Cinemas Wilton 4, 21 River Road, 761-0767
Georgia Rule: 12:30, 4:15, 7:15, 9:40
Next: 12:15, 4:30, 6:30, 9:15
Spider-Man 3: Noon, 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9

Silvermine

Continued from Page D3

be a serious genre gap.

The competition awarded 14 cash prizes and selected 109 works for exhibition. The top prize is Paul Kaiser's gargantuan self-portrait meticulously rendered in graphite titled "Self Portrait (as Husband, Father, Soldier, Son)." A looming 8-foot canvas of Kaiser's omnipresent, disembodied face begs for personal history outside the title. Eyes dulled, mouth slightly agape, brow furrowed, it's the kind of piece that dares you to nose up and examine each singular pore and facial hair without embarrassment. Standing too close to this piece is like an invasion of privacy. Kaiser's "golly gee" technique is impressive and the title foray's into the artist's intense dose of introspection.

Second highest cash prize is Joanne Luongo's minimalist piece "I Think, Therefore I Sew." A weave of black thread horizontally traverses a medium-size cream-colored material rectangle. The weave swells and vibrates, abruptly ending with the needle frozen midstitch. A few threads dangle down to the bottom bisecting the unfinished canvas as an afterthought.

The sculpture award went to a collaborative piece, "Geminis Ascending," a frilly, multimedia floor assemblage. The artists are Marilyn Clements, Judith Steinberg and Barbara Rothenberg. Fanciful, balanced and painterly, screens roll and wrap, empty frames jostle around as rejected studio detritus and a raz-ma-taz of coiled wire interplays with colored paper and material.

Timothy Cahill's "Myth of Clay" is a large unframed mixed-media of oil, chalk and pastel. An unfocused hodge-podge obliquely connects smaller paintings, some with photographic images that about each other over two large slathery painted surfaces.

The sublime black-and-white photograph "Big Baby Day" by Barbara O'Shea is a gem. An older, seated woman under a paper umbrella faces off-center while behind her is an oversized statue of a diapered baby, hands raised, gaze affixed. Sandwiched between the statue and the older woman is a mother and two young girls faced away from the camera examining the super baby sculpture. The moment is precious. The two outward frozen gazes by woman and statue snapshots the life-cycle.

Debianne Cingari's tongue-in-cheek photograph of a doorless, solitary out-house in the desert is appropriately titled "The Sunday Read." A hobbled toilet as the throne of contemplation is the hub among angular shadows from leaning, raw, rotten wooden walls.

Patricia Kearney's "Blow Hole," a silver gelatin, black-and-

white photograph is a sleek, silky interpretation of a whale catching a slice of sun off its hull.

The small, mixed-media piece as a flattened house shape cut into black wood is by Elizabeth Coleman titled "Abode 1." The front door is a slab falling open from the bottom revealing a scuffed piece of drawing pad paper with words about silence scribbled on the side. The work is strangely haunting, enshrouding mystery.

The harrowing "Exposed Negative #2" by Jay Brodsky is a black-and-white oil taken from a photograph of a 1930 lynching in Marion, Ind. According to the artist, a lynch mob of about 10,000 white people stormed the county jailhouse and lynched two black men accused of raping a white girl. Taken from a photograph found in a Life book of "influential photographs," the stark, grizzly scene has anonymous faces peering out from under two bodies hanging from the tree. That Brodsky chose to rework a photo negative works brilliantly in desensitizing violence.

Sandy O'Brien's lyrical series of six encaustic tiles, each with single words such as "Yes," "Fly" and "You," are created with a light hand. Floating circles — finite and lazily outlined — swim among spheres and "magnified drops" over muted background tones. The works are fun and deceptively childlike.

David Dunlop and his son, Max, were recognized for their collaborative oil painting "Riding the 7 Train." A racy oil painting on aluminum has us peering out a rail car window. The sleek blur angles match the rock of the train where the "screech" hits as the car leans almost off the metal canvas. The gleaming surface is interrupted by a splash of corrosive, like acid, sparking a gritty punctuation to the ride.

With the exception of one or two works, this is a very clean show; no drips, no rough spots, no crumpled textures. Known as a tough show to get into, more than 600 artists entered: 300 from Connecticut and 200 from New York — about 100 artists submitting work were from Northeast states spanning from Rhode Island to Pennsylvania.

The effort to pull a comprehensive show like this together is huge and the gallery not only offers artists exposure but they also hope to sell the work. There is some leverage here; many Silvermine viewers are art collectors and one would hope that work isn't chosen to match domestic décor but for a quality aesthetic.

"Art of the Northeast is on view through June 8 at the Silvermine Galleries, 1037 Silvermine Road, New Canaan. Tuesday-Saturday, 11 a.m.-5 p.m.; Sunday, 1-5 p.m. 966-9700 or www.silvermineart.org.

Large size is a big plus for 'Hairspray' star

BY RACHEL ABRAMOWITZ
LOS ANGELES TIMES

NEW YORK — It's easy to see who Nikki Blonsky was a year ago. On YouTube, there is footage of an unknown girl — small, chubby and completely forgettable in black jeans and schlumpy black T-shirt, scooping ice cream in a Cold Stone Creamery on Long Island.

There's also footage from the moment Blonsky left scooping for good — "Entertainment Tonight" showed up to film the 17-year-old receiving the news that she had won the part of Tracy Turnblad in the new screen musical "Hairspray."

In the clip, Blonsky begins yelling, throws her hands over her face and then promptly falls off her chair, crying hysterically.

"I'm shaking. I'm surprised I'm still standing," she tells the interviewer.

And then she belts in a startling vibrato: "I love you, Baltimore!"

Less than a year after she was anointed, Blonsky looks streamlined and professional as she poses for pictures in a fancy Manhattan steakhouse. With professional makeup, her eyes appear alert and doe-like; her hair cascades over her delicate white blouse — cinched precisely with a huge red belt. She totters on red platforms that add inches to her 4-foot, 10-inch frame. She holds her hands to her face in a send-up of an old-fashioned publicity still.

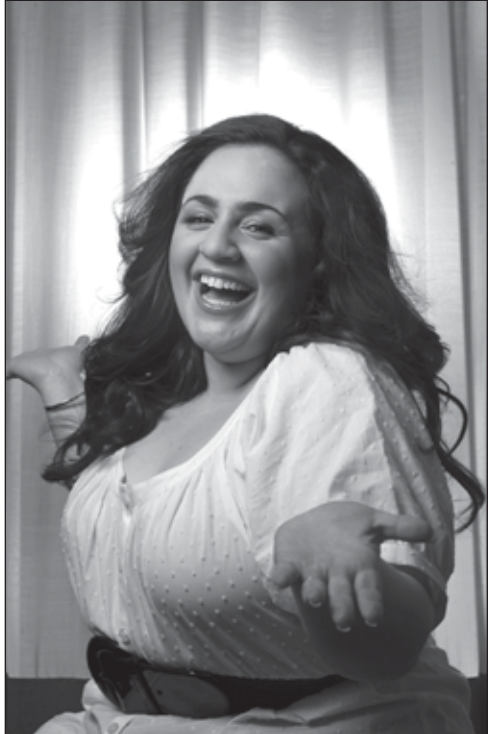
Without a doubt, 18-year-old Blonsky is hurtling through Hollywood's starmaking machinery. If New Line, which is releasing "Hairspray," gets its wish, she will become the Jennifer Hudson of 2007, the unsuspecting, unlikely ingenue who by dint of sheer talent gets to be queen for the day.

Much the way the Nathan Lane-Matthew Broderick film version of "The Producers" was based on the Broadway show rather than the original Mel Brooks movie, director Adam Shankman's "Hairspray" follows the stage version more closely than the John Waters movie — which is not to say the camp film director had no input.

Set in 1962 Baltimore, the movie tells the story of the irrepressible Tracy Turnblad, a chubby girl with the improbable dream of appearing on the local teen-dance program, "The Corny Collins Show." When fate intervenes, she not only ends up on the TV show, but becomes a star and launches a campaign to racially integrate the program.

The film, which opens July 20, also stars John Travolta in drag as Tracy's mom, Christopher Walken, Queen Latifah, Michelle Pfeiffer and "High School Musical" star Zac Efron.

The daughter of a school aide and a local



Carolyn Cole/Los Angeles Times photo
When Nikki Blonsky saw the stage version of "Hairspray" three years ago at age 15, she told her mother, "I can do that."

government worker, Blonsky was given a ticket to the Broadway musical when she was 15. As the first scene began, she leaned to her mother and whispered, "That's me. That's totally me. I can do that."

Soon after, Blonsky who had been singing since she was 3 and began voice lessons at 8, auditioned for the Broadway show but was told she was too young. Two years later, she was scouring the show's Web site looking for open auditions when she saw the notice that the movie was casting.

She sent a homemade tape to New Line and an assistant watched it, posted it on MySpace and called the casting department to take a look.

Shankman, who was a choreographer before becoming director of "The Pacifier" and "Bringing Down the House," wanted to find a 17-year-old to play Tracy, someone who not only could sing but also "needed to be really pretty, so there was a believability factor about Link falling in love with her, and she had to be fat, not chubby. That was John Waters' request: 'Promise me she's going to be fat.' That's an essential component to her character."

The director saw Blonsky's tape and thought, "That's really authentic. She's

very green, but seemingly spot-on," Shankman says.

He and his casting team nonetheless finished their search, which encompassed some 1,000 girls with open calls in the United States, England, Canada and Australia. In the end, the finalists were three girls who had played Tracy in various professional productions and Blonsky, who appeared to incarnate Waters' screen heroine.

"She was living (Tracy's) experience. Nikki doesn't see the world with any judgment. She's nothing if not unbridled enthusiasm with a strong family life, and that's who she plays in the movie. The biggest challenge for me was when I brought her to Baltimore to dance with the other candidates. She wasn't the best dancer, but she had the most joy. That's the idea. She's not the best, but she sells it the most and she enjoys it the most."

Blonsky spent five months in rehearsals, with an assistant choreographer teaching her to dance — everything from the fundamentals of switching her weight from foot to foot to "Hairspray's" more elaborate choreography.

Blonsky has a huge voice, an operatic one (the last part she played in high school was Carmen in the Bizet opera), but "she sounded like an old lady," says Shankman, who worked with her to re-engineer her singing to make her sound younger, teaching her to sing from the front rather than the back of her throat and her chest.

Like Tracy, Blonsky has always been heavy-set.

"I was a curvy girl," she says matter-of-factly. "Growing up, I would see all these thin, tall pretty girls that I looked nothing like, but I did realize you don't have to be a size 2 or 6 feet tall to be a singer. You can be who you are and believe in yourself. Tracy is that amazing character that I was meant to have in my life. Watching her in the Broadway show and listening to the songs changed my life."

"It doesn't matter what anybody looks like, what race, how tall or how thin. To Tracy, it's not about that. It's about what's in your heart, your passion, your love for life."

Blonsky is happy to point out that Tracy Turnblad is not only helping break some Hollywood taboos, she's breaking the mold for dolls as well.

"We just found out there's a Tracy doll. I'm excited to have the first plus-sized doll, a real woman-curves doll. It looks like me as Tracy. I'm really excited for little girls to be able to go to the store and see my dolls next to the Barbies and realize it's OK to be different."