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By Edward Sozanski

Contributing Art Critic

West Prize exhibition. It's not surprising that Philadelphia's Dufala brothers, Steven and Billy Blaise, won the top prize in the inaugural competition sponsored by the West collection in Oaks. The Dufalas were awarded \$25,000 for their sculpture *Ice Cream Truck Tank*, a boxy, full-scale vehicle that combines the amenities of a vendor's van with heavy armament up front - a cannon and several machine guns.

The startling incongruity of the combination - innocent pleasure and calculated destruction - makes the truck-cum-tank a showstopper, so one can understand why collection curator Paige West picked the Dufalas over the other nine finalists. Yet the choice also is disappointing, because other works in the prize exhibition, installed at the financial services firm SEI, seem to offer more substance.

If one reads the truck-tank as an emblem of the United States' national schizophrenia about its role in the world, then the piece stands up to several more nuanced and technically adept works, particularly the two videos by Rob Carter called *Metropolis* and *This England?*, and the manipulated color photographs of German artist Georg Parthen.

However, I'm guessing that the tank-truck is more of a smile-inducing bit of cleverness whose appeal derives from its details, which include a toilet in the rear cabin and a serving shelf, from which ice cream was dispensed at the opening reception.

For me, Carter's *Metropolis* is the exhibition's most compelling work. The video, compiled from images of buildings around the world, compresses the evolution and decay of urban civilization, from raw forest to bustling conurbation, and its inevitable regression to nature, into nine stop-action minutes. *Metropolis* is especially effective when projected onto a theater-sized screen, which it is whenever the screen isn't being used for something else.

Parthen's landscapes are intriguing in a much quieter way. In some, he inserts structures into pristine Alpine landscapes in a way that makes them appear both logical and disturbing. His alternatives extend reality just to the edge of, but not beyond, the boundary of plausibility.

The West prize competition attracted artists from around the world. Thirty-six hundred entered; they were winnowed to 10 finalists. From each, the West collection purchased \$10,000 worth of art. The \$25,000 cash prize is in addition to that.

As one might expect from young artists, the exhibition featuring the finalists is heavy on photography, media technology, and work that involves several stages of transformation. Traditional painting and sculpture are lesser presences.


■ The West Collection prize exhibition continues at SEI,

1 Freedom Valley Dr., Oaks (at the Oaks exit from Route 422) through April 1. It can be seen only by appointment, between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. Mondays through Fridays. For information 610-883-7368 or www.westcollection.org.

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Exerpt from article that can be found at

http://www.philly.com/inquirer/columnists/edward_j_sozanski/20090308_Art_Show_is_a_primer_on_the_Victorians.html

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