

ART IN REVIEW

'Ironic/Iconic' -- Kira Lynn Harris, Adia Millett and Kehinde Wiley

By HOLLAND COTTER

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The Studio Museum in Harlem
144 West 125th Street
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The Studio Museum's artists-in-residence program has propelled many young talents forward in its 35-year history. This year's participants look more than promising in their wrap-up show.

In "Freestyle" at the Studio Museum in 2001, Kira Lynn Harris showed nearly abstract photographs derived from an installation she had created in a Brooklyn gallery, using sheets of silver Mylar. Several of her new pictures are also based on photographing this reflective material; they look like studies in the viscosity of light.

Others, however, are shots of New York City dissolved into patterns of impressionistic color: subway headlights streaking through darkness, the Empire State Building as a luminous filigree at night. Ms. Harris rounds out her contribution to the show with a sound piece composed of traffic noises, music and conversations recorded on 125th Street, as if to suggest that the city itself is a colossal installation or painting, kinetic and ephemeral.

Adia Millett works directly with installation, often on a miniature scale. Her pieces, titled "Records of Self-Perception Without Ownership," consist of dollhouse-size interiors, each meticulously furnished but with details slightly off: a shabby living room is hung with old master paintings; a bedroom is an engulfing mass of fabric designs.

The show's single walk-in piece is also a bedroom, elaborately appointed but gone to seed. A kitschy pseudo-Rococo table is propped up with a vodka bottle. A cockroach infestation goes unchecked. "The Official Preppy Handbook" lies open on the unmade bed. Upwardly mobile dreams and on-the-skids reality meet, as they do in a set of cross-stitch embroideries hanging nearby, with images of hard cash and rot-gut vodka.

Fantasy and realism also mingle in the figure paintings of Kehinde Wiley, who was included in the museum's "Black Romantic" show earlier this year. His realistic portraits of young African-American men recall those of Barkley Hendricks, but are more overtly emblematic. Heads are surrounded by auras of radiating gold arabesques; the two figures in the diamond-shaped "Easter Realness" are the same person, differently dressed and floating in space.

Such paintings are derived from photographs taken by the artist, then turned into something else: particularized portraits that are also masculine stereotypes, figures that are at once personally expressive and self-consciously chic. This ambiguity -- are these people we should care about, even admire, or simply models advertising themselves? -- is what gives the work interest, along with Mr. Wiley's formal polish. Christine Y. Kim, the assistant curator at the museum, has given the show a crisp, clean shape. It's terrific that an institution is paying this kind of confident attention to young artists, and, in this case, to young freelance writers and curators like Malik Gaines, Eungie Joo and Franklin Sirmans, who contributed short essays to an exhibition brochure.

Incidentally, be sure to take a look at Edgar Arceneaux's solo exhibition "Drawings of Removal" on the first floor. It's in the form of a single wrap-around wall drawing in progress, inspired by a visit to his father's hometown, Beaumont, Tex. His father's memories turned out to be episodic and contradictory, a dynamic

reflected in drawings that the artist is simultaneously executing and obliterating through the run of the show. (He will be there next from Wednesday through Aug. 11.)

Mr. Arceneaux, who lives in California, is an exciting combination of superb draftsman and subtle conceptualist. His first New York gallery solo is scheduled for December at Deitch Projects. HOLLAND COTTER