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Art

## Celebrating a Decade of Nurturing Artists on the Verge

By SUSAN HODARA

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GALLERY representation and museum exhibitions are elusive goals for many artists, regardless of their perseverance and talent. For the past decade, a program organized by the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum and the Ridgefield Guild of Artists has been trying to help. Radius: Professional Practice Series for Artists offers selected artists from Connecticut and southeastern New York an exhibition of their work as well as professional guidance and networking opportunities designed to start them on the path toward commercial success.

THEY'VE EMERGED The painter Christopher Mir, top left, next to a detail of his oil "Vanishing Point" (above), was a 2001 participant in Radius, a program for emerging artists in Connecticut and southeastern New York. Work by Mr. Mir will appear in "Full Circle: Ten Years of Radius."

Other Radius veterans are also represented in the show: "With Wood Grain XXV" by Alyse Rosner, top right; "The Great New Wave" (2007) by Ben Weiner, top left; and "Apple Tree" by Joseph Smolinski, bottom.

To mark the program's 10th anniversary, the Aldrich is presenting "Full Circle: Ten Years of Radius," an exhibition featuring the work of 14 of the 81 artists who have participated in the program.

Reflecting on the success of Radius, Harry L. Philbrick, the director of the Aldrich, said, "A key indicator is the careers of the artists who have been included in our exhibitions."

Christopher Mir, 38, a painter in Hamden, Conn., was a 2001 Radius participant. He is currently preparing work for a solo show opening this month at Galeria Senda in Barcelona, and for a show in March at the Chelsea gallery Rare, which represents him. This month, the Yale University Art Gallery will hang Mr. Mir's painting "Dear Traveler," which it purchased in 2004, beside a painting by Anselm Kiefer.

In New Haven, Joseph Smolinski, who was a Radius artist in 2004, is creating drawings for a solo exhibition at Swarm Gallery in Oakland, Calif., set to open in May. In September, Mr. Smolinski, 33, had his first New York City solo show at Mixed Greens, the gallery that represents him. His sculpture "Tree Turbine" is on display until April at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art in North Adams, Mass.

Ben Weiner, a painter who grew up in Dobbs Ferry and now lives in Long Island City, was part of Radius in 2005. He will be exhibiting his work at the Pulse Contemporary Art Fair in Manhattan in March, through Mark Moore Gallery, in Santa Monica, Calif., which represents him. Mr. Weiner, 28, is currently working on paintings for his second solo show at Mark Moore, in April 2010, and recently signed with the newly opened Collette Blanchard Gallery in Manhattan.

“Full Circle: Ten Years of Radius,” which includes works by Mr. Mir, **Mr. Smolinski** and Mr. Weiner, was curated by Regine Basha, an independent curator based in Brooklyn. The exhibition presents a range of work — paintings, works on paper, video, sculpture — reflecting the diversity of the Radius artists to date.

Radius is open to emerging artists (defined as those who do not have commercial gallery representation in a major market) of all ages and media who live in Connecticut and in Westchester, Putnam and Dutchess Counties in New York. “Radius’s focus is on artists who are making good work and not receiving the recognition or exposure they desire or deserve,” Mr. Philbrick said. “We drew a circle around the museum, hence the name Radius. We want to acknowledge that there are artists working in these suburban and rural areas who are just as serious as those working in New York City.” Finalists, he said, have ranged in age from their early 20s to their mid-60s.

Submissions are evaluated by representatives from the Aldrich and the Guild; currently they are Mónica Ramírez-Montagut, the curator at the Aldrich, and Debra K. Browne, the Guild’s exhibitions director. To be considered as a finalist, Ms. Browne said, applicants “have to be absolutely ready for the next step.”

“They have to have vision,” she said. “They have to have a command of their medium and excellence of execution. They have to have a clear sense of why they are doing what they are doing, and their work has to be relevant to what’s happening in the art world.”

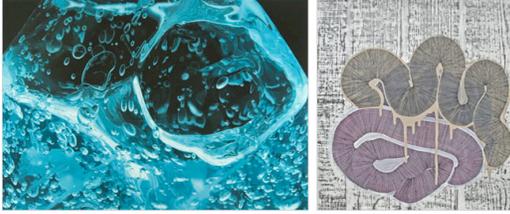
Ms. Browne said Radius’s applicant pool has grown from approximately 10 in its first year to nearly 400, and the selection process has become increasingly difficult. “The submitted work continues to get better,” she said.

After choosing between 10 and 12 finalists each year from 2005 to 2007, this year only 6 artists were selected.

In addition to an exhibition of their work at the Ridgefield Guild of Artists, Radius artists are given a one-on-one portfolio review, currently with Mr. Philbrick, Ms. Browne, Ms. Ramírez-Montagut or Richard Klein, the Aldrich’s exhibitions director. They are also invited to attend the Professional Practice Forum at the Aldrich, where panels, composed of gallerists, curators and other art professionals, discuss strategies for succeeding in the art marketplace. Another component of Radius — For Artists Only! An Open House for Artists and Related Professionals — provides a networking opportunity at the Aldrich that includes informal portfolio reviews. Each spring, Radius, which is financed by the Aldrich, presents three professional development workshops aimed at helping artists market their work. Past topics have addressed creating an artist’s statement, writing a résumé, preparing submissions, designing a Web site, hosting a studio visit and strategic planning.

“Even without the exhibit, even if we confined Radius to our workshops, the program would still benefit a lot of people,” Ms. Browne said. “They get handouts, they meet other artists and the curatorial staff at the museum. If they pay attention, they get a huge amount of advice.”

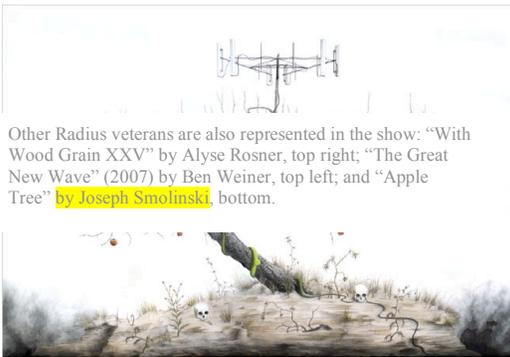
It is advice not easily found elsewhere, according to Alyse Rosner, 40, an artist in Westport who participated in Radius in 2004 and whose work is in “Full Circle.” “I went to graduate school and no one talked about the professional side of things,” she said. “That kind of information from Radius has been extremely helpful.” Ms. Rosner’s work is currently in a show at the Haskins



Laboratories Gallery at Yale, and was recently part of a show at the Barbara Krakow Gallery in Boston.

When Mr. Smolinski was a Radius artist, his portfolio review was with Mr. Klein, “a curator who has worked with a lot of artists I look up to,” he said.

“For him to critique my work was invaluable,” he said. “Being treated like a professional artist, being



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written about by curators, being included on the Aldrich’s Web site and in their press releases — all that was really important.”

Using resources distributed at one of the Radius workshops, Mr. Smolinski applied to Real Art Ways, a gallery in Hartford. “I was in a group show there in 2006, and then had a solo show,” he said.

For Mr. Mir, knowing that his work would be exhibited through Radius “shook me up,” he said. “It would be a public display of my paintings. I had to make them count.”

Shortly after that show, Mr. Mir said, a curator who saw his paintings told him, “Hold onto your hat!”

“I was in five group shows in 2002,” Mr. Mir said. “Radius had focused me, galvanized me, and helped me realize deeper work.”

He said his painting “Day One,” on display in “Full Circle,” was “part of a continuum of paintings that began with Radius.”

“Full Circle: Ten Years of Radius,” through June 7. Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, 258 Main Street, Ridgefield; (203) 438-4519 or aldrichart.org.

“Radius: Emerging Artists from Connecticut and Southeastern New York,” Jan. 25 to March 7 (opening reception, Jan. 24, 4 to 7 p.m.). Ridgefield Guild of Artists, 34 Halpin Lane; (203) 438-8863 or rgoa.org.

[http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/04/nyregion/connecticut/04artsct.html?pagewanted=1&%2359;scp=1&%2359&\\_r=2&%2359;sq=full%20circle%20aldrich&%2359;st=cse](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/04/nyregion/connecticut/04artsct.html?pagewanted=1&%2359;scp=1&%2359&_r=2&%2359;sq=full%20circle%20aldrich&%2359;st=cse)