

TexasMonthly

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OUT THERE

Houston The Contemporary Arts Museum Houston can be forgiven if its latest exhibit seems less than precisely defined. **"Nexus Texas,"** opening this month, is (very) broadly described as "new work by a group of artists living and working in the state." That's quite a pool to choose from, but the CAMH's three organizing curators have managed to select sixteen creatives from all parts and all backgrounds who work in just about every medium you can think of. The one thing they have in common, though, is that none are household names; most are familiar only to those who troll obscure galleries and read online art zines. Luckily for both artist and viewer, a lack of widespread recognition does not coincide with a lack of talent, at least not here. Take for instance **Jeff Zilm's** eerily arresting paintings, which are made with pigments stripped from 35mm movie film negatives that are then trickled onto canvas. The result is light wisps of images on a nearly blacked-out surface that conjure up the amorphous faces of ghosts. Equally as conceptual, though a 180-degree turn in the other direction, are Sterling Allen's quirky offerings, such as his found-object creations. *Chicken Wheel*, for one, is just as comic as it sounds: two yellow plush-toy chicks suspended from green garden hoses that are attached to a children's bicycle wheel. You can't miss it on his Web site, sterlingallen.com. Amy Blakemore's poignantly simple photographs, on the other hand, are easy to miss if you're not right in front of them. Included in the 2006 Whitney Biennial, her soft-focus snapshots—often portraits of friends (think old ladies with beehives) and familiar suburban landscapes (a deer decoy in the backyard)—show off an acute eye. It's important to keep in mind that "Nexus" is not meant as a survey or celebration of the state's best or even next best. There's something refreshing about what it *is* meant to be: an openly subjective reminder that artistic currents are running deep in Texas, if we only know where to look. *Aug 18—Oct 21. 5216 Montrose Blvd, 713-284-8250, camh.org*