

A Textured Toughness

By Paul Richard

The Jane Haslem Gallery, 1669 Wisconsin Ave. NW, is showing four young local artists with widely differing intentions and techniques. Of the works on exhibition the most impressive are William Batts' three-dimensional paintings in polyester fiber glass.

They resemble scarred and blasted landscapes, pocked with rocks, eroded by tiny rivulets of rain. Batts begins with a box of fine-grain sand, plants the sand with stones and twigs, then moistens it and pits it until he is satisfied with its richly sculptured surface. The polyester syrup that he pours upon that sandscape picks up the first grain layer and, when hardened, provides a light-weight negative of his sandbox mold. Batts' castings are rarely more than one-eighth of an inch thick. He tints them beige and brown and hangs them on the wall.

These objects, with their varied textures, their shadow-casting caves and canyons, have a quality of toughness lacking in the other works on exhibition here.

Eugene Martin's little colored drawings are intimate and pleasing. He works with ink and crayons, and his spontaneous swooping lines hint at rodents, fists and faces.

Both Michael Phillips, who works with Plexiglass and walnut, and Sally Anderson, who makes colorful batiks, are skillful, but their works are somehow trite and dated. They brought to mind those "Modernistic" interior decorations one used to see in 1950s furniture store displays.

Phillips, who makes gleaming little sculptures, occasionally achieves a sort

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of stained-glass window look by sandwiching paint, gold leaf and colored tissue paper between sheets of transparent plastic.

After working cloth with a wax resist and many colored dyes, Sally Anderson mounts the cloth on board and draws on it with ink. These are jolly pictures, patterned with brightly colored butterflies and flowers, and for some reason they recall kitchen decorations and cookbook illustrations. The group show at the Haslem Gallery will close on Aug. 15.