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# ART IN REVIEW; Dona Nelson -- 'Tactile Image'

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Dona Nelson gets plenty of respect, but no one would accuse her of making paintings that are too easy to like. Over the past three decades her art has reflected an adventurously tough-minded approach to process and a vehement avoidance of anything conventionally ingratiating.

This show presents a puzzlingly hermetic body of work based on a two-step operation. First the painter creates a heavily textured composition using modeling paste, twisted lengths of cheesecloth and paint. Then she makes rough, smudgy reproductions of the original by laying raw canvas over it and rubbing or scribbling with pencil or charcoal.

The four paintings project a full-frontal ugliness. One in ghastly blues, yellows and grays is like a nightmare of Monet on steroids. Two featuring all-over webs of ropy gauze -- one all baby blue, the other a cold synthetic green -- look back to Pollock. The fourth, in golds, beiges and ivory whites, gives the impression of a gaudy theater set.

The rubbings, two for each painting, are tantalizing. Some are left as ghostly traces. In others, Ms. Nelson has intervened with paint; in one, for example, she added a passage of neat red stripes and a brief mint-green spiral. This play between the raw and the finished is visually engaging, and it offers, one feels, a promising way out of a murky transitional phase.  
**KEN JOHNSON**

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*NY Times 1/31/03 "Tactile Image"*

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