'Youth Culture' exhibit represents more than the works

By Alan G. Artner TRIBUNE ART CRITIC

outh Culture Killed My Dog (but I don't really mind)," at the TBA Exhibition Space, is one of the recent years—though not for the art it presents.

The distinction of this effort

comes from how it happened future of "cutting-edge" art in Chicago.

"Youth Culture" is the first exhibition sponsored by the Contemporary Arts Council, an organization composed largely more important exhibitions in of members from a former supporting group of the Museum of Contemporary Art.

Six months ago, the council

came together to underwrite anand what it may mean for the nual exhibitions and serve as an unaffiliated forum for issues in art of our time.

> Each of the members—there currently are more than 100 paid \$250 not only for the exhibition but also lectures, panel discussions and visits to artists' studios plus public and private collections.

"Youth Culture," which was

curated by Chicagoans Kathryn Hixon, Joe Scanlan and Irene Tsatsos, is the council's sole exhibition for 1995. It includes work by 14 artists from New York, Chicago, Los Angeles and San Francisco.

Although most of the exhibitors have gallery representation, they will be unfamiliar to a large local audience, none more so than the eight artists who

live and work here.

The sort of introduction the show provides was once the responsibility of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago and a combination of notfor-profit and commercial galleries.

But shrinkage on the gallery scene has left the city with fewer venues for showing odd, often unsalable work. And if the council is unable to present more than one yearly exhibition, that's still one more than there was six months ago, and we're especially grateful for it in these financially challenging times.

Whether "Youth Culture" was the best exhibition with which to begin is another matter; I happen to think it was not but still welcome the material it contains because the more provocative art the city sees, the better.

The people most in need of seeing the show are those who still think only art begets art. Nowadays, the influence of popular culture is equally strong as a generator of artistic endeavor, particularly among artists who have grown up with television and rock music.

This may well be the first exhibition to offer for sale a "soundtrack" of songs that plays in the gallery as an aural backdrop. Whenever music has been in art exhibitions in the past, it instantly has become an intrusion, but not here.

Here there's precious little to distract you *from*, as the works, like the music, assume an audience has a short attention span. The pieces operate, in effect, on the time structure of commercial television, serving great amounts of kitsch in rapid-fire succession.

Little on view strikes deeply; a sort of work based on cartoons, B-movies, Elvis dolls and rock lyrics is not meant to. It engages its viewers instantly and recedes. Even ironic or "protest" pieces demand scarcely more time than that able to be given by a hyperactive teenager.

The show is provocative be-

cause, no matter what one thinks of individual pieces, when taken all together they constitute an art of the future. Not the art. Humankind will always be more diverse than that.

It's an art that freely plays with the conventions of mass

culture. Some pieces suggest that their play has somehow gotten around those conventions when they only have become the things they set out to criticize.

Nobody really escapes pop culture. On some level, we're all

shaped by it. This time, the artists seem more aware of that than are the curators. (At 230 W. Huron St., through May 20.)

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