

Puzzling unknowns, daydreams, and comic relief

By Cate McQuaid
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Each of Ann Pibal's succinct abstract paintings moves the eye nimbly over the picture plane.

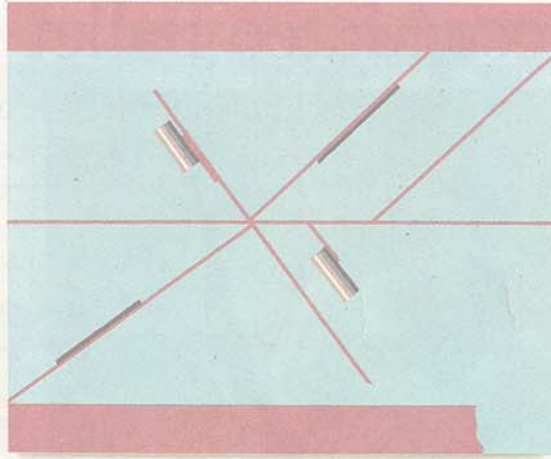
GALLERIES Sharp angles, crisp lines, sometimes tangy color values, and, in her most recent pieces, breathy brushwork all portray a quizzical intent. She's like a physicist scribbling equations over a white board, puzzling out vital, small-scale unknowns.

But her methodical equations, in the acrylic-on-aluminum paintings now on view at Steven Zevitas Gallery, have a graceful simplicity you don't see on many white boards: straight lines, intersections, and little trolley-like loafs of color that ride along the lines, adding up to a system of weights and balances.

Look at "EXTS," in powdery gray-blue and red. The red lines could almost map a small downtown area, with five shooting off at clean angles from a central horizontal stripe. Some of them carry freight: lean black bars, flat sandwiches of beiges and browns. A fat, red bar streaks across the top. At the bottom, a second red bar doesn't quite reach the right border. It aborts with an alarming ragged tear. Amid the rest of the perfectly straight edges here, it's like a pimple on a model's face.

Pibal's paintings, like those of Turner Prize winner Tomma Abts, are resolutely controlled. At times, they feel arid and confined. So it's daring when she introduces the painter's hand, as she does in several works here. "THFR" features more straight lines, with several candy-colored ones peeling upward, splintering from their central arteries. Pibal sets them against a gray ground, painted in wide, lush strokes, tinged with color. That ground reads as a driving rain, and opens the painting to space, drama, and heart.

Works like these are no less precise, but the artist pits that exactness against something less about motion, and more about emotion — which may just blow these delicate constructions of



Above left: "EXTS" by Ann Pibal. Above right: "TV" by Tory Fair. Below: "Stuart," by the collective !ND!V!DUALS.



ANN PIBAL: Los Dos
At: Steven Zevitas Gallery
450 Harrison Ave., through
May 4. 617-778-5265,
www.stevenzevitas
gallery.com

TORY FAIR
At: LaMontagne Gallery,
555 East Second St., through
April 20. 617-464-4640,
www.lamontagne
gallery.com

ANOTHER WORLD
At: Blanc Gallery, 110
Brookline St., Cambridge,
through April 30.
508-768-7611,
www.blancgallery.com



lines and intersections right down.

Triggering reverie

Tory Fair has, for some time, strived to evoke the ethereal quality of daydreams and contemplation in her art — a tall order for a sculptor. In the past, she has used the figure as a starting place, with flowers enveloping bodies as a signal of dreaminess. In her show now at LaMontagne Gallery, Fair turns to objects that may trigger reverie, and crystals have taken the place of the flowers.

Some of these work more effectively than others. "Windshield," in fiberglass and resin, is brilliant in how it embodies both

inner retreat and threat, functioning as a talisman and a cautionary tale for all of us who space out behind the wheel. Yellowish, opaque, ringed with crystals like jagged teeth, this true-to-scale windshield looks almost like a portal to an alternate universe.

"Full Length Mirror" has a similar feel. The ornate, rubbery black frame contains an oval black plane adrift with alluring smoky blossoms. This cast resin mirror doesn't reflect; it prompts reflection. "TV" features two boxy monitors in cast aluminum, lying like thrown dice on the floor. Lacking screens, they have wide-open maws, a fitting metaphor for

how televisions can entice us into mindless watching.

Sketchier pieces push to make tangle the woolly void into which we retreat. "Reading" features a wedge of cast aluminum with two eyes imprinted on one edge, like the chute into which we tumble as a good book absorbs us. I don't know that there's any way to effectively turn that lusciously immaterial experience material.

A lighthearted show

Blanc Gallery, an alternative art space that has been generating heat since it opened six months ago, has a lighthearted show with art that crawls over the walls and moves throughout the gallery, curated by artist Silvi Naci.

The most narrative piece is a cheeky series by the collective !ND!V!DUALS spoofing the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum heist. The group makes comical, clever animal figures out of scrap wood. The three pieces here, scattered for storytelling effect throughout the space, include "Trot," a wily fox suspended from the ceiling, holding canvases torn from their frames in his hot paws; "Stuart," a monkey security guard who has been tied up, and the bear "Chauncey," another guard unaware of the caper going on nearby.

Randal Thurston has installed "Ceremony," one of his baroque, black, cut-paper murals, with dark flowers, insects, and lizards unfurling symmetrically around a central skull. Several of his black butterflies swarm elsewhere in the gallery.

The other artists make work that evokes sprawl. Audrey Goldstein's delightfully hybrid sculpture-drawings address the wired (and wireless) world, social relationships, and the body. Ilona Anderson offers "The Zebra Suites," a morsel of her ongoing project that meanders over time and space, "Dwell: A Drawing Installation." The drawing, in occasionally neon tones, climbs the wall over patches of black paper in a mazelike structure of rambling mechanical, architectural, and organic forms, with characters such as a zebra and a flamenco dancer suggesting narrative and communal links.

Some of printmaker Chris Cavallero's copper plates, reminiscent of falling leaves, are mounted on the wall near the gallery's stairway. Cavallero's abstract etchings are cut up in pie-like slices and reassembled out of order. Chock-full of almost-made connections, they radiate and spin.

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