

PERSPECTIVES

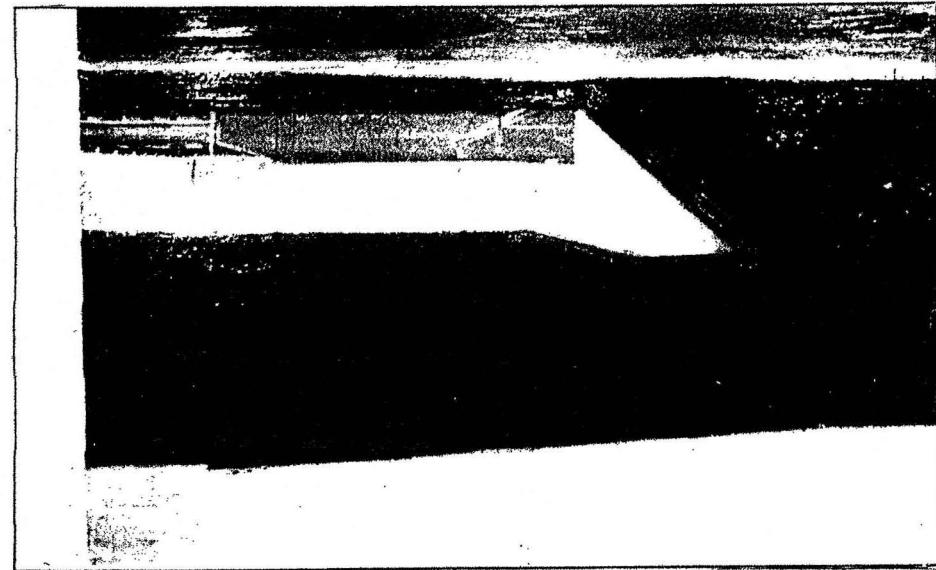
Landscapes thrive on Newbury

By Christine Temin
Globe Staff

Landscape of a particularly lyrical strain is thriving in Newbury Street galleries this week. Richard Sheehan is exhibiting abstracted views of expressway underpasses at Alpha Gallery; Michael Mazur shows scroll-length pictures of single tree branches, at the Barbara Krakow Gallery; Bunny Harvey offers lush, back-to-basics black and white drawings of grasses, water, hills and sky, at the Randall Beck Gallery. And the Stavaridis Gallery is showing landscapes by a quartet of gifted painters: Bostonians Robert Ferrandini and Jeremy Foss, and New Yorkers Christopher Pfister and David Lowe.

All these landscapes are indebted, more or less, to some previous tradition in painting, and no debt is greater than Sheehan's to Richard Diebenkorn. From simplified views of cozy Dorchester three-deckers, works that owed a lot to one of his teachers, George Nick, Sheehan has progressed to big, bold, brushy paintings that have the drama of Diebenkorn's "Ocean Park" series. Much of the thrill in Sheehan's large new paintings — at Alpha, 121 Newbury St., through March 8 — comes from very small details — matchstick fences and pale ghosts of buildings — pitted against two-foot wide sweeps of colors. These are fast paintings, with racing diagonals pulling you back into space, and horizontals passing in a bright blur, as if seen from a speeding car. "Expressway Bridge Superbowl Sunday," almost eight feet tall, beckons with juicy bursts of lemon and peach at the bottom, and then guides you to a wide expanse of inky blue-black. The buildings in the distance are almost swallowed up by the paint.

Sheehan uses titles to tell you his subject's location or even to tell you about the weather the day he painted it: "A Very Windy Day" is the name of one work. But despite this specificity, these unpopulated pictures could depict



Detail from Richard Sheehan's "Freeport Bridge, 1989."

Globe staff photo/Bill Greene

highways just about anywhere. And along with the painterly grandeur of these works comes a stinging sense of loneliness and anonymity.

Mazur's new paintings — at Krakow, 10 Newbury St., through March 8 — borrow their simplicity from Oriental art. Where they depart is in a sense of turbulence. In tree branches that writhe and twist through space like snakes in pain, and also act as a barrier between you and the panoramic landscape beyond. Subject, shape and material are wedded: The branches stretch across the centers of long horizontal wooden panels, which are otherwise left alone, encouraging a comparison of real wood with painted tree. Mazur also offers some shimmering, luscious, liquid monotypes on silk, depicting pine trees.

Bunny Harvey's recent works on paper are at Beck, 168 Newbury St., through March 1. Har-

vey also does trees, but instead of isolating them, she fits them into balanced views in which every part of the landscape gets its due. A virtuoso with pastel and charcoal, she can create a velvety stillness in some works, where hills and bays seem momentarily to hold their breath, and a rippling, breezy quality in others. Only in the lone city scene in the show, the charcoal, pastel and gouache "Urban Thoughts," do Harvey's more bustling devices — intersecting planes and swinging, compass-like arcs — appear.

The show at Stavaridis — 73 Newbury St., through Feb. 25 — features small, quiet works. Jeremy Foss uses thick, opaque oils to partition his little rectangles into water, land and skies made up of a dozen colors softly blending. His too-good-to-be-true palette, with an emphasis on sugary pinks and blues, adds a surreal, fantasy element.

Robert Ferrandini's compact paintings gleam darkly, in an Old Masterish way. In "Krishna Holds Up the Mountain as an Umbrella" the towering peak of rich, deep

browns and turquoises is barely discernible from the equally dark sky. Look closely, and the magical little picture is full of details, including an elephant standing in a flowered meadow.

Christopher Pfister's paintings have the melancholy atmosphere of Claude Lorraine. Small and decidedly vertical, they feature tall, dark trees silhouetted against pale skies. In "All and Some," molasses-like color fills the lower two-thirds of the painting; only the ruffly line between this darkness and the lightness beyond clues you in to the subject of trees and sky.

David Lowe's works are part of the recent blurring between painting and sculpture. His boxy, intrusive hunks of wood project six or eight inches from the wall. The paint on them is in a deliberately "off" palette of sickly greens, grays and blues, and it is scraped, scratched and otherwise battered into interesting textures. The woodgrain itself becomes an active part of these rather classically composed landscapes of horizontal bands.