Report from Boston

BY SARAH McFADDEN

Recently awakened to 20th-century culture, Boston is beginning—slowly but surely—to embrace contemporary art for the first time since Impressionism.

. . . I go . . . for the man who inherits family traditions and the cumulative humanities of at least four or five generations. . . . I go for the man with the gallery of family portraits against the one with the twenty-five-cent daguerreotype.

—Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes[1]

. . . the taste of the [Boston] owner is immaterial for, generally speaking, everything is either an heirloom or a wedding present.

—Cleveland Amory[2]

More than most cities, Boston harbors a paradoxical mix of antediluvian tradition and high level sophistication. For centuries dominated by an exclusive clique of conservative "first families," the Hub (of the solar system, as Boston was once considered by its leading citizens) managed more or less to ignore the 1913 Armory show when it came to town, and to remain impervious to all developments in art that occurred between Impressionism and '40s Expressionism. Since World War Two, it has evolved into a major scientific and technological research center. Digital, Honeywell, Raytheon, Polaroid, Itek, Wang, GTE all have headquarters in the vicinity, and have attracted a new class of professionals. According to local reports, their impact on the city's culture and economy has finally made itself felt over the past five to ten years. The renaissance, as it is sometimes termed, that has resulted is of course due to more than just the influx of savvy out-of-towners. The 20th century was bound to force its way into this bastion of inherited values sooner or later. But the newcomers have certainly cleared its path. Meanwhile, Boston's clubby old world with its genteel charms endures. Its authority has eroded, but its principles and conventions remain intact. What this adds up to is a cultural expansion: Boston continues to sustain its revered symphony while nurturing a thriving rock club scene; it supports not only the Vose Galleries, purveyors since 1850 of French Barbizon School paintings, but also galleries handling blue-chip moderns and a new crop of dealers beginning to specialize

Louis Risoli: **Alive and Knowing,** *1983, oil on canvas, 66 by 136 inches. Stux Gallery.*

Friedl Dzubas: **Argonaut,** *1982, acrylic on canvas, 116 by 289 inches. Knoedler Gallery.*

Gerry Bergstein: **Effort at Speech,** *1982, oil on canvas, 60 by 96 inches. Photo Willa Heider.*

Hyman Bloom:* Still Life #1, *1980, oil on canvas, 62 by 50 inches. Terry Dintenfass Gallery.

in work by young Boston artists.

Another factor contributing to Boston's emergence into the present is its education industry, for which it has been celebrated since long before the advent of microchip technology. (Once known as the Athens of America, the greater Boston area has some 65 institutions of higher learning, one of the highest concentrations in the U.S.). Burgeoning art schools and art departments now support throngs of artist teachers who perform miserable-to-commendable jobs of ministering to the needs of information-hungry students. (This year, Harvard's survey course in 20th-century abstraction, which has a maximum enrollment of 400, was oversubscribed by nearly half.) Beyond the classroom, however, and despite the fact that this is a consummately verbal city, there is little professional-level discourse on art. With few exceptions, Boston's art world looks to New York for such stimulation. For this reason, and due to the fact that modesty and frugality still rank among Boston's prevailing virtues, the considerable amount of art activity that takes place here does not coalesce into a graspable scene, but is dispersed among a wide variety of institutions and a large number of artists scattered throughout Boston, Cambridge, Somerville, South Boston and the outlying communities of Waltham, Lincoln, Framingham and Brockton.

The "Official" Scene

Boston's contemporary art institutions have two principal aims: to show work by local artists, and to provide a window on current national and international developments. The latter function is best fulfilled by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Hayden Gallery, a modest exhibition space administered by the Institute's Committee on the Visual Arts, whose director (since '78), Kathy Halbreich, schedules shows that regularly nudge the local art world out of its parochial slumber. According to Halbreich, the Hayden seeks to be "as present-tense as possible" and has an educational mandate to make contemporary art intelligible. All exhibitions are organized either in-house or by guest curators, who are sometimes artists; Roberta Smith, Michael Mazur and Jackie Winsor are among the outside curators the Hayden has engaged. Boston's first significant shows of recent figuration and of the European "transavant-garde" (a print show) were held at the Hayden in '81 and '82, respectively. The gallery has also ventured into the gap between art and useful objects in shows of clothing and architect-designed furniture. This past winter, a superb temporary installation by perceptual artist Jim Turrell (a rare solo show) was commissioned.

MIT's Hayden Gallery organizes exhibitions that regularly nudge the local art world out of its parochial slumber.

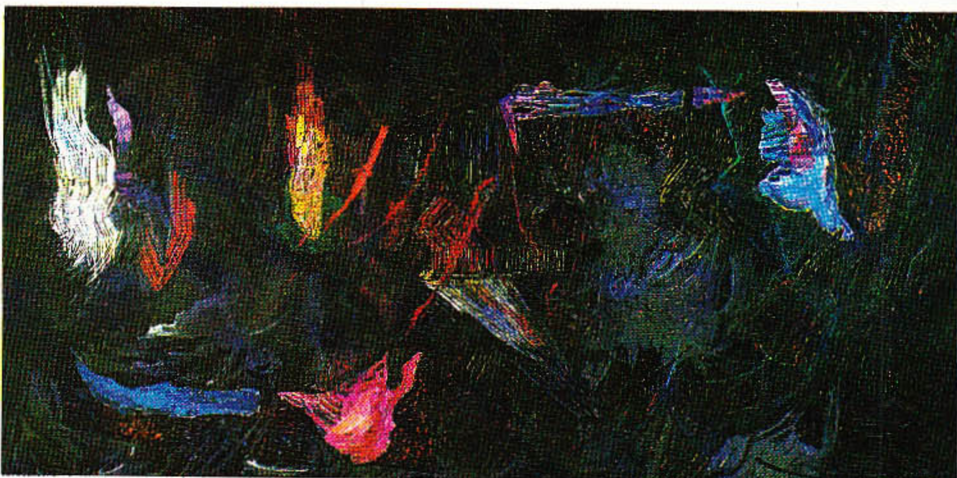
Although the Hayden Gallery is perhaps Boston's premier showcase for advanced art, it is regarded as something of an anachronism by some of its MIT constituency, who feel that painting and sculpture were years ago made obsolete by technology's "available hardware." In the face of such criticism, the gallery has held fast to a view of art as coexistent with but not dependent upon the latest technological developments. It will have to cleave even more tenaciously to this position when it moves in summer '84 from its present quarters in one of MIT's main academic buildings, where it appears as a conspicuous curiosity in the anonymous labyrinth of corridors, to a new I. M. Pei-designed facility for arts and media technology. There, it will be surrounded, but hopefully not eclipsed, by divisions of research in computer communications and other scientific/futuristic ventures. To compete for attention, the gallery may be pressed to demonstrate that art is as inventive as science. The new building, at any rate, should present a case for art on an equal footing with architecture. Three artists are currently collaborating with Pei on aspects of the building's design: Kenneth Noland on the exterior skin, Scott Burton on interior furnishings, and Richard Fleischner on landscaping.

More easily identified with MIT is the art produced at the Institute's Center for Advanced Visual Studies, an interdisciplinary research center for collaborations between artists, scientists and technologists. The current roster of CAVS fellows includes visual artists, musicians, poets, dancers, filmmakers, computer scientists, mathematicians, structural theorists and architects—all in-

vited to the Center to "push their mediums." The diversity and exploratory nature of projects currently underway are best conveyed through specific examples: Paul Earls, originally a composer of electronic music (and affiliated with CAVS for the past 12 years), is refining techniques for projecting video imagery with laser beams; artist-neurophysiologist Todd Siler is mapping correspondences between the processes of human intuition and nuclear fission; Joel Davis has contracted with NASA to send the first artist's payload—bottled gas—into outer space. Discharged from the space shuttle (scheduled for launching this September) at an altitude of ca. 200 kilometers and shot through with an electron beam, the gas should be visible as a multi-colored aurora over thousands of miles of the earth. Another of Davis's plans is to build the first sculptural monument on Mars, using a mechanical arm to erect a mound of stones.

There are also two deep-sea artists at CAVS (Jurgen Claus and Brian Rogers), along with others working with steam, solar energy, holography, kinetic neon, and, of course, film and video. Otto Piene, director of the center since '74, is best known for orchestrating large-scale public art events (operas, conferences) that often feature his own immense helium-inflated sculptures. He is the prime-mover of annual, international "sky art conferences" whose exhibits range in technological complexity from aerial cello solos by Charlotte Moorman, borne aloft by the power of helium, to satellite performance pieces involving networks of distant participants. Periodically, Piene retreats to his studio in Düsseldorf, where he paints earthbound works on canvas.

Roger Kizik's studio. Left* Phyllis, *1982, 10 by 21 feet; center* Endowment, *1982, 10 by 15 feet; right* Salty Goose, *1981, 10 by 23 feet.



John McNamara:* The Conspiracy, *1982, oil on canvas, 9 by 17 feet.

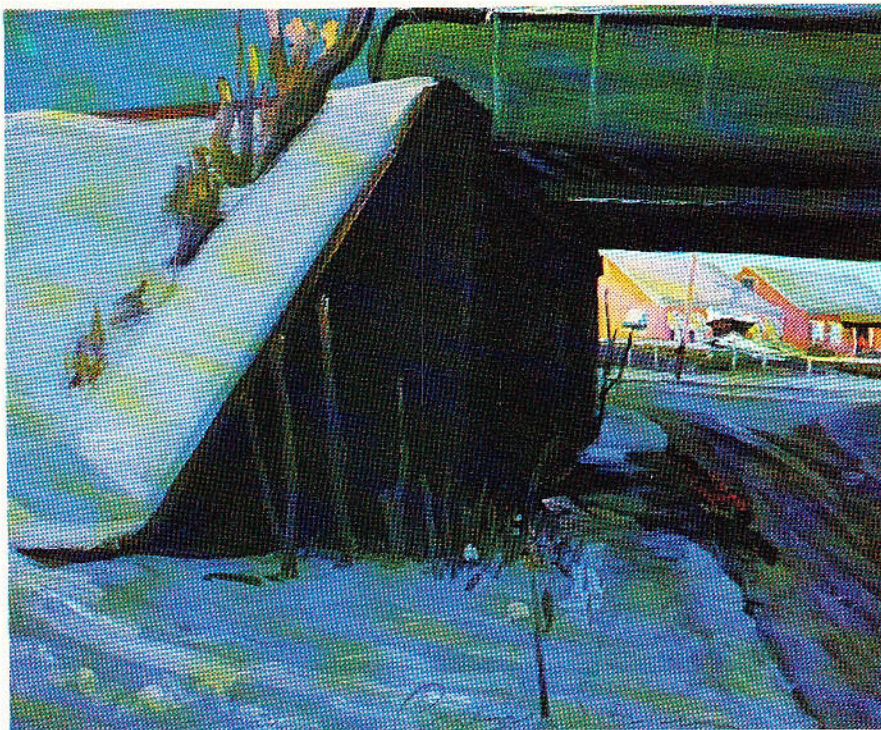
Across the river, Boston's Institute of Contemporary Art seems on the brink of a new era after years of financial instability and ambiguous orientation. Its new director, David Ross, instituted this country's first museum video department at the Everson Museum in Syracuse, and was subsequently curator at Berkeley's University Art Museum. In just one year, Ross has done much to revitalize the ICA. Observing that Boston is predominantly a "painting town," he has transformed the Institute's little-used theater into a video theater, which serves also as a stage for weekly art performances. Besides the artist-run Boston Film/Video Foundation, the ICA is the only place in town offering video and performance art on a regular basis.

Beginning this fall, it will program one film per week in one of Boston's commercial cinemas. It will also inaugurate a new exhibition format—an 18-month long, continuously changing international group show of works from the last two years, representing a cross-section of current trends. Up to five works each by as many as five artists will be on view at any one time, including special commissions. The rationale for this open-ended approach is to allow for maximum curatorial flexibility and spontaneity, and to minimize curatorial heavy-handedness. Nonetheless, the ICA's education department is gearing up to assist the public in making sense of what it sees: narrative wall labels and separate brochures on each artist will be available; guards will be trained to discuss the works on view; cooperative programs with local art schools and departments, not heretofore a major ICA constituency, will be established.

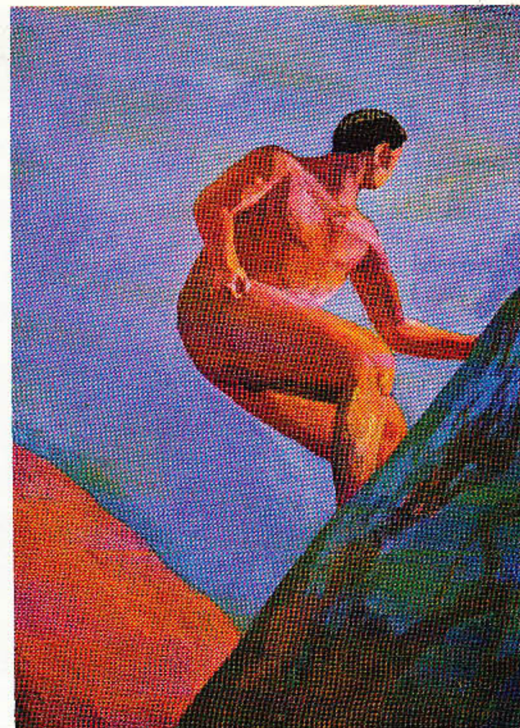
The ICA will continue to organize and receive more conventional theme shows, but these will be mounted in alternative spaces (still to be found) around town. The future of its locally celebrated Boston annual is uncertain: there is a possibility that it will be discontinued and absorbed into the main show.

The new setup should render an invaluable service to Bostonians eager for ongoing exposure to a wide range of recent art. There is no other Boston institution which attempts this: not the Hayden Gallery, with its space limitations and stricter didactic charge, nor the commercial galleries, which are too few to collectively accomplish the task and remain solvent. In the words of one dealer, "Boston is still a landscape and Color-Field city."

One of the country's best defended strongholds of Color-Field painting and Greenbergian doctrine is the Boston Museum of Fine Arts's department of 20th-century art. Established in 1971 and placed under the charge of its present curator Kenworth Moffett, the department, which encompasses European art since 1900 and American art since 1945, had the formidable task of starting quite literally from scratch. A bit of history is in order: until relatively recently, the BMFA had little truck with any art that post-dated and departed stylistically from Impressionism. (The museum's 41 Monets comprise the largest group outside of France.) This policy



Richard Sheehan: Victory Road in Snow, *1983, oil on canvas, 46 by 56 inches. Alpha Gallery.*



Cliffton Peacock: Ascent, *1982, oil on canvas, 94 by 71 inches. Segal Gallery.*

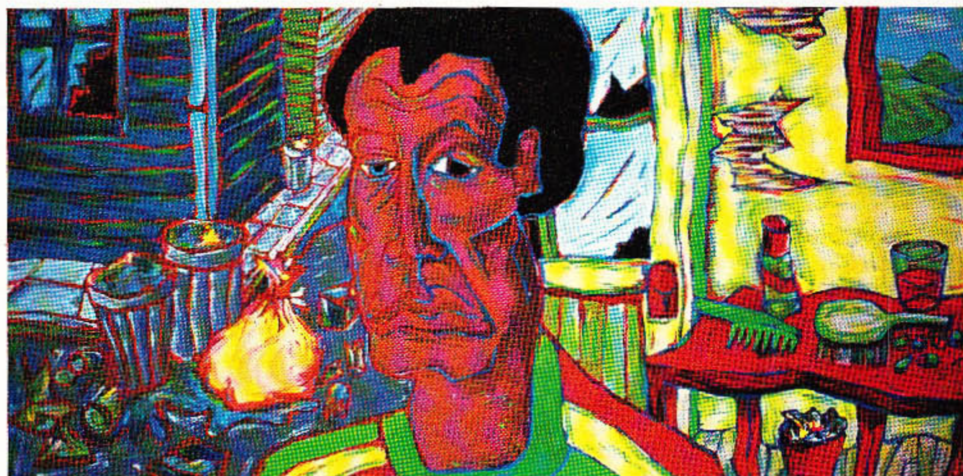
Doug Anderson: There is No Cure Find a Cause for It, *1982, oil on canvas, 84 by 72 inches.*

Marc Mannheimer: Are the Masses Powerless?, *1983, acrylic and rhoplex on canvas, 60 inches high. Stux.*

reflected not only the taste of the town, but also of highly respected members of the museum's staff. Ananda Coomaraswamy, Keeper of Indian art, wrote the following admonishment in 1941: "It is unnecessary for museums to exhibit the work of living artists, which are not in imminent danger of destruction, or at least, if such works are exhibited, it should be clearly understood that the museum is really advertising the artist and acting on behalf of the art dealer or middleman whose business it is to find a market for the artist."[3] What Coomaraswamy deemed museum-worthy were "ancient or unique works of art which are no longer in their original place or no longer used as was originally intended, and are therefore in danger of destruction by neglect or otherwise."[4]

The one mode which might arguably qualify as a trend among young Bostonians is a brand of large-scale figuration that would look at home in any "hot" N.Y. gallery.

Aaron Fink: Hat (For C.S.), *1982, oil on canvas, 76 by 100 inches.*



Dana Chandler: The Ghetto, *1983, acrylic on masonite, 4 by 8 feet.*

Notwithstanding such fixed opposition, a provisional acquisitions gallery opened that same year to facilitate "experimental acquisition of modern work, especially of young and comparatively unknown painters, in the hope that the museum might present a cross-section of contemporary activity, while guarding against the danger of being saddled with acquisitions whose interest is only temporary."[5] Whatever happened to that commendable effort remains a mystery. It was not until 1956, under Perry Rathbone's directorship, that the MFA became seriously involved with the art of this century. That year, it opened a permanent 20th-century gallery, and in '57 organized its first modern art exhibition ever: "European Masters of Our Time." The museum acquired its first Picasso in '58, its second in '64. Both were purchases, for, as Rathbone explained, "we cannot anticipate the bequest of major works of Picasso from Boston collectors."[6] However sparingly, Rathbone continued to buy 20th-century works, predominantly of European origin, until he was forced to resign (for other reasons) in '72, leaving modernism more absent than accounted for.

And so the situation remains today. Moffett's predisposition toward abstraction that perpetuates the stylistic breakthroughs made by Helen Frankenthaler, Morris Louis and David Smith has resulted in a contemporary collection so lopsided that it looks like the consequence of either hubris or tunnel vision. Louis, Poons, Noland, Olitski, Dzubas, Sandi Slone, Anthony Caro, Willard Boepple and their followers are made to represent the sum total of "high quality" and "good taste" in the art of the past 30 years. Moffett does have a limited admiration for certain figurative painters—Fairfield Porter, Horacio Torres, and Bostonian Barney Rubenstein are among the few—and to his credit has engaged outside curators to organize shows of work that lies outside his singular field of interest. Photo Realism, Conceptual art and Post-Minimal sculpture have thus made fleeting appearances at the MFA.

The museum's contemporary art plight was exacerbated by a 50-percent cut in exhibition space when the 20th-century gallery moved to the new west wing in 1981. To add insult to injury, two of the new gallery's main walls are interrupted by tall, deeply embrasured windows which admit floods of sunlight and close-up views of the not notably tranquil outside surroundings. The architect (I. M. Pei) would seem to have been inspired by Gertrude Stein's oft-quoted remark, "When I am at a picture gallery my one idea is to look out a window."[7]

Within a few years, when renovations in the old building are completed, space will be allotted there for 20th-century art; the new gallery will be used to show only the most recent works in the collection. But if the scope of contemporary acquisitions remains as narrow as it is at present, this gallery will likely function as a rather exclusive forum for successive generations of Color-Field abstractionists, and Coomaraswamy's injunction may prove not so reactionary after all.

More catholic views on contemporary art do exist within the MFA. John Walsh, Jr., curator of paintings until he leaves in June to direct California's Getty Museum, is well known to Boston artists as both a collector

Catherine Bertulli: **The Green Piano,** ***1982, watercolor and craypas. 36 by 47 inches.***

Chris Enos: **Roses,** ***1980 Polaroid photograph, 80 by 40 inches. Thomas Segal Gallery.***

and friend. Ted Stebbins, hired by Walsh as the MFA's curator of American paintings, focuses his professional interest in current art on the ICA, where he heads the exhibitions committee and is vice president of the board of trustees. Clifford Ackley, associate curator of prints, drawings and photographs, who has been with the MFA since 1966, is widely credited for giving contemporary art a prominent place on his department's agenda (as well as with bringing photography within its purview). To find a work by Rauschenberg or Johns, or examples of Pop art, neo-expressionism or new figuration of any stripe, one goes to the museum's prints and drawings collection.

This situation may change: a few Bostonians—some of them museum trustees (Graham Gund is the most obvious example)—are assembling first-rate contemporary collections which may end up at the MFA. However, such bright prospects should not distract the museum from taking prompt initiative to rectify the over-specialization of its 20th-century department which, I am told, is becoming a hot issue.

The Outlying Museums

Several small, outlying museums run far more eventful contemporary programs than the MFA's and attract a good deal of attention despite their distance from the center of town. They include Brandeis University's Rose Art Museum (in Waltham), the Danforth Museum (Framingham), the Brockton Museum and, at least until recently, the DeCordova Museum (Lincoln). The eclectic proclivities of Carl Belz, director of the Rose Museum since '74, make that institution a worthy foil to the MFA. A former classmate of Frank Stella at Princeton, specialist in Man Ray and the Dadaists, and author in the '60s of a book on rock music, Belz (who was preceded at the Rose by Sam Hunter and William Seitz) has guided the museum from fiscal disaster to relative prosperity, directed its acquisitions toward the formation of a broad-based contemporary teaching collection, and instituted a modest exhibition program that is intelligently responsive to a motley constituency. Belz has funds to organize one major show per year; most have been monographic and of national interest: Frankenthaler from the '50s, Alex Katz, Mel Ramos, Stella's metal reliefs, early Matta, Charles Garabedian. In the other slots are work by Brandeis faculty, selections from the permanent collection, small groups of Boston-area artists, invitational theme shows. The probing treatment given the two latter categories often distinguishes them from similar undertakings by neighboring institutions.

Betsy Connors: **Nuclear Vacationland,** ***1982, Polaroid photograph, 24 by 20 inches. Segal Gallery.***

The Danforth Museum's current (through July 3) series of five temporary installations by Boston-area artists has placed that museum squarely on the local map, at least for now. Beyond rare occasions at the Hayden Gallery, the ICA and one or two commercial galleries, there is scant opportunity for local artists to show this kind of work.

Under David Katzive's direction (1981–83), the DeCordova Museum began to fill that gap. Using Artpark as a model, and with funding from the Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities, Katzive initiated a program for commissioning permanent outdoor projects on the museum's 35 wooded acres. By the time Katzive resigned under pressure this past January, four works

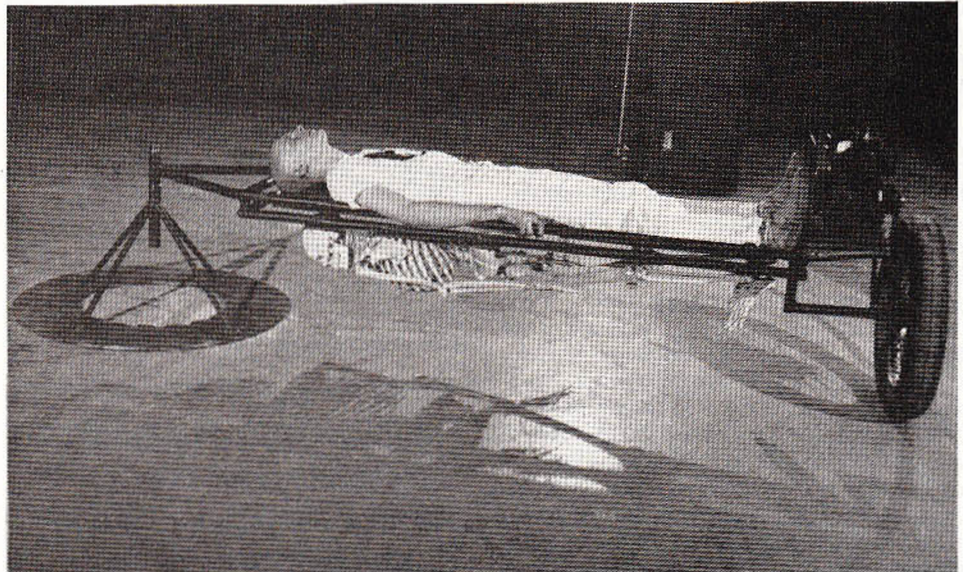
(two by Boston artists) had been completed, and two more were under contract. The contracts will be honored, but no additional works commissioned while the museum's goals are reexamined and a new director (the third since '79) found.

Katzive's "irreconcilable differences" with the board of trustees stemmed at least partly from his success at the very thing he felt he was hired to accomplish: transforming the DeCordova into a museum of national standing. Established 30 years ago as one of the region's few museums committed to contemporary art, the DeCordova was kept on a balanced diet of historical, regional and contemporary shows by Fred Walkey, its director until 1979. Eventually seeking to liven things up, the trustees hired David Katzive to replace him.

Katzive's curatorial flair was more than they had bargained for, and his penchant for administration something less. The museum's exhibitions made headlines as its financial crisis worsened. The unsettling (to the trustees) celebrity of its contemporary exhibitions culminated in this past winter's concurrent shows of computer drawings by Harold Cohen and video-game imagery as related to contemporary painting. Attendance at the DeCordova was never higher; the show was even blamed for a rash of truancy in the local schools.

With Katzive out and his ambitious exhibition program slated for retrenchment, the trustees are attempting to adjust museum policy to reflect the taste of its local suburban constituency—perceived, once again, as regional, historical . . . and contemporary. If all goes well, a new director will be named this summer. A new position—that of senior curator—will be filled in the fall.

Natalie Alper: **Bright Passage,** ***1982, acrylic and pencil on canvas, 54 by 128 inches.***



Alex Grey: **Human Race,** ***1982 performance at the Overland Theatre, Boston.***

The Galleries

Although a substantial number of cooperative galleries exist, Boston has virturally no alternative spaces. The seeds of one were sown this past winter, however, by Tufts graduate student Jerry Beck. Beck rented a dilapidated cellar in the South End's run-down commercial district, installed his show and opened it to the public. The art—assemblages of urban detritus and animal remains gathered from a vacant, waterside lot in South Boston—was distinctly out of synch with the normal fare of Boston's commercial galleries. "From a Desert in Boston," as the show was called, most closely approximated a one-man version of New York's ABC No Rio. Beck invited video- and filmmakers to screen their works in the "gallery." The place was packed. Encouraged by Beck's example, a group of artists is attempting to secure the space (now known as The Basement) as a non-profit gallery. As of the end of last month, they had managed to keep up with the rent and hold a two-person show.

Aside from the Federal Reserve Bank, where prepackaged group shows of Boston art are sometimes held, the nearest thing to an alternative institution is the gallery run by Northeastern University's African American Master Artists-in-Residency Program (AAMARP). Headed by Dana Chandler, AAMARP is particularly sympathetic to work by minority artists, and mounts exhibitions ranging from solo shows of nationally known figures (Benny Andrews, for example) to large, juried exhibitions (Boston-area women artists). AAMARP is receptive (and therefore unique among Boston establishments) to art with overtly political subject matter. Not that much of it is produced in Boston, even among ethnic minorities, but, according to Chandler, what little there is has so far been ignored by galleries and museums. In Chandler's view, there are fewer than a handful of political artists in town ("they can make statements, but not a living"), notably himself and Arnold Trachtman. Chandler's most potent subjects are taken from local incidents of racial violence and discrimination, which he treats with an almost caricatural verve and in lurid colors reminiscent of Red Grooms. Trachtman is a contemporary history painter whose indictments of individuals and of society bring to mind the work of Diego Rivera (and were shown by AAMARP in '81).

The Boston Visual Artists Union's political activities, which focus on artists' rights and interests, tend to be educational, social and persuasional rather than visual. (BVAU does organize exhibitions such as one last year aimed at convincing a local agency to increase the proportion of its public-art to its landscape commissions.) Group shows selected from the BVAU membership (which numbers between 800 and 1,000) and held in various places throughout the city (AAMARP, the Federal Reserve Bank, BVAU's own gallery) are not on a par with the organization's lobbying efforts.

The ratio of artists to commercial galleries is daunting enough to drive any career-minded artist out of Boston—and indeed, many of them leave. Among those recently settled in New York are Christopher Sproat, Bobby G., Gregory Amenoff, Joel Janowitz, Todd McKie, to name a few of the more familiar. Still, since the early '50s, when only two contemporary galleries of any consequence existed—Boris Mirski and Margaret Brown—the gallery scene has expanded appreciably, although by no means commensurately with the artist population. Newbury Street, Boston's Madison Avenue, has always been the center of the city's art trade. It is now lined with some

10 contemporary galleries worth mentioning (and visiting).

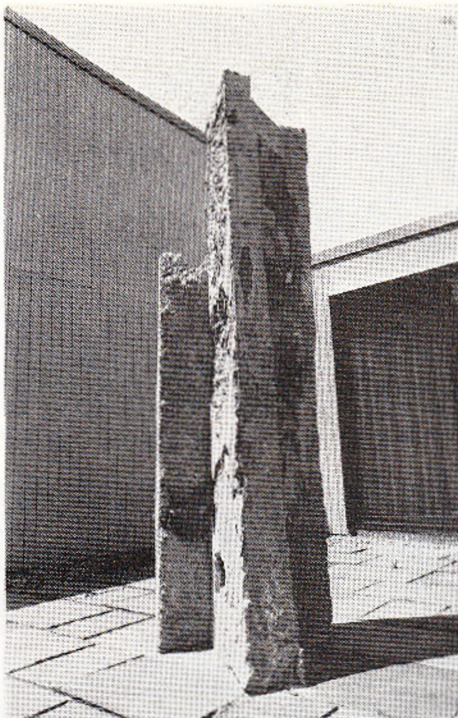
About five years ago, new territory was staked out for art in the warehouse district known as Fort Point Channel; there was talk of a second SoHo. Led by Helen Schlien, who pioneered the presentation of large-scale works, installation pieces and performances, a cluster of new galleries specializing in work by emerging Northeast artists set up shop there in lofts far roomier and more affordable than anything on Newbury Street. Unfortunately, Boston was not ready to support two art districts. Between openings, traffic—and sales—slowed to a trickle.

Having waited patiently for the area to catch on, Helen Schlien and Pat Stavaridis move their galleries to Newbury Street this month. (Stavaridis's former partner, Bess Cutler, is now dealing privately in New York.) Another dealer, Andre Lopoukhine, plans to relocate there in the fall. The exodus strips Fort Point Channel of major galleries and bodes ill for the few that remain, with the possible exception of Alchemie, a new, non-profit space directed by Ted Landsmark, a lawyer and photographer with sophisticated marketing ideas.

Undeterred by the turn of events at Fort Point Channel, the Thomas Segal Gallery recently opened an annex in Jamaica Plain, about three miles from its home base on Newbury Street. Located on the top floor of a former brewery, Big in Boston (as the new space is called) is the only commercial facility in town that can accommodate large-scale works. Sculpture will be installed on the lower rooftops and in the courtyard of the sprawling, fortress-like building. Just as Big in Boston is likely to reflect its parent gallery's penchant for big names (the inaugural show featured works by Frankenthaler, Noland, Kelly, Rickey, Calder, Voulkos, etc.), it will also probably reflect its nascent involvement with local artists (the gallery now represents about a dozen Bostonians).

Other galleries that keep one eye on New York and the other on Boston are Nina Nielsen; Portia Harcus; Barbara Krakow, whose 18-year partnership with Portia Harcus recently ended—last month, Krakow opened her own gallery across the street; and, to a lesser degree, Magnuson Lee, primarily a print dealer. In an ironic inversion of Coomaraswamy's pronouncement against museums acting as commercial galleries, several dealers in town see themselves as helping to perform a job proper to museums: that of exposing and educating the public to a broad range of contemporary art. Of course, galleries everywhere can and do contribute to public knowledge, but given the museum situation in Boston, this is not just a redundant claim.

Besides Helen Schlien, the major dealers in current New England art are Alpha, Impressions and Stux. Although Alpha does a brisk backroom business in master prints, German Expressionism and the estate of Milton Avery, its most conspicuous activities center on emerging representational painters from the Northeast. Run by Alan Fink, a Boston dealer since 1951, the gallery also shows the work of Katherine Porter, now a nationally known abstractionist living in Maine, and Harold Tovish, father figure and mentor to generations of Boston artists.



*Mark Cooper: Derek, **1980**, cement and acrylic, 8 feet high. Brockton Museum.*

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More typical of Boston galleries that maintain a regional focus are Stux and Impressions, both of which show an enormous variety of work—much of it innovative or stylistically of the moment. Currently seen as the hottest gallery in town, Stux has probably won more artist admirers in its three-year existence than its longer established Newbury Street neighbors. This is partly because from the start, Northeast art has been Stux's mainstay. This is true of Helen Schlien and a few others as well, but so far they have met with less success. Stux's stable now contains about 50 artists.

The sole contemporary gallery in Cambridge is Van Buren/Brazelton/Cutting, which shows an eclectic group of predominantly young, local artists. Although it claims to have no shortage of visitors, there appear to be few buyers among them. Such is not the case with the Clark Gallery, which is located in a shopping mall in Lincoln. The gallery's benign monopoly over this affluent suburb, home to numerous collectors, has induced several Boston artists to show there.

Photography

Bostonians claim that their city is a "big photography town." One reason is the Polaroid Corporation's liberal sprinkling of its products over the region—it provides free film to selected photographers in exchange for examples of their work. These become part of the corporate collection, housed in its own Cambridge gallery. Polaroid also donates large-scale equipment: the Boston Museum School has been given one of Polaroid's 80-by-40-inch cameras, for example, which is said to cost $50,000—without its $100,000-flash accessory, which they have too.

Needless to say, plenty of Boston photographers take Polaroid pictures. Two working in large format who exploit the medium's most salient characteristics—color and narrow depth of field—are Chris Enos and Betsy Connors. Connors, who also works in video and is a fellow at MIT's Center for Advanced Visual Studies, photographs miniature sets she constructs from toy figurines and assorted everyday objects. Disjunctions of scale and narrative lend humor or horror to ostensibly banal subjects. Titles often supply necessary clues to meaning. A palmy poolside scene, for example, is called *El Salvador*. Enos is best known for her close-up details of dying plants and flowers. Magnification of the inexorable forces of decay renders these images at once monstrous and, in their abstract perfection, seductive.

Regional practitioners of manipulated photography abound, championed by Davis Pratt, associate curator of photographs at Harvard's Fogg Museum. Exhibitions at Harvard's Carpenter Center are organized by Barbara Norfleet, photography curator in the department of visual and environmental studies, whose efforts have done much to revive and advance interest in studio and documentary photography, respectively. Today, one of the area's most accomplished documentary photographers is Roswell Angier, whose strongest work to date exposes the harrowing cultural disintegration of the Navajo Indians.

Minor White, who in 1965 established MIT's Creative Photography Laboratory and remained at its head until '74, was an important influence on Boston photographers throughout his tenure. Since his departure and death in '76, the Lab has been directed by Starr Ockenga. One of Boston's few graduate photography programs, and notable at MIT for its art (as opposed to research) orientation, it is being closed permanently in June.

A younger national figure, Nicholas Nixon, has hardly any local presence at all. Although he has lived and taught in the area for the past nine years, Nixon remains so aloof that many Bostonians familiar with his work are unaware that he is in their midst.

Mags Harries: **Asaroton** *(detail), 1976, bronze castings in cement pathway 56 feet long. Boston Haymarket.*

Jerry Beck: **From a Desert in Boston** *(detail), 1983, first installation at The Basement, one of Boston's only artist-run alternative spaces.*

For a city of its size, Boston is fairly well stocked with photography showcases. The MFA holds frequent exhibitions directed by acting photography curator Clifford Ackley; MIT has (had) its Creative Photography Gallery; both the ICA and the Hayden Gallery include photography on their agendas; and the Harcus, Stux and Segal galleries do as well. The doyen of Boston's commercial photography galleries, Carl Siembab, has been in business for 27 years. More recent arrivals are Vision, Klein and Brent Sikkema. Boston's Photographic Resource Center, founded in 1976 by Chris Enos, is an information clearinghouse that ties this loosely knit scene together. It also sponsors lectures, exhibitions and administers grants.

Schools and Influences

It is rare to find a Boston artist without some past or present link to either the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, the Massachusetts College of Art, or Boston University's art school. Although each institution has its supporters and detractors (B.U. is said to train artists to draw the figure so well that they can never do anything else), the MFA School is the least rigid and probably the best loved. This is true despite the fact that some staunch Greenberg adherents teach there: Friedl Dzubas (who donates his time and is one of the school's most sought-after instructors), Sandi Slone, Willard Boepple, Jim Wolfe. Yet the program advocates no single style or ideology and is agreeably unstructured.

Philip Guston taught at B.U. from the early '70s until his death and, in the *Boston Globe* art critic Robert Taylor's words, "put students back on the track of being artists, not careerists." He had an enormous following, and his influence lives on in the work of many young artists, notably that of Jonathan Imber, whose penetrating, larger-than-life portraits include several of Guston himself.

Senior figures widely respected for their art, ideas and general examples include Maud Morgan, Hyman Bloom, Harold Tovish and Michael Mazur, whose senior status is conferred by reputation, not age. (All four happen to have New York galleries.) Morgan, who studied with Hans Hofmann, taught Frank Stella and Carl Andre at Andover, showed with Julian Levy in New York in 1938 and, since 1948, has been with the Betty Parsons gallery, is described as "an inspiration." At 79 she is an inveterate traveler, political activist, portrait painter and abstract collagist.

Like Morgan, Tovish, widely known for his series of bronze self-portraits emerging from abstract matrices, is admired for his political commitments and his interest in and encouragement of young artists. Mazur, whose best representational paintings have an eschatalogical edge, is esteemed for the same reasons and, because he is considerably younger, as a model of a Boston artist who has made it nationally.

Bloom, a Bostonian since 1920, is the most venerated and elusive of the group. His reputation is based on his art and on his single-mindedness in pursuing it. Bloom spurns the expressionist label often attached to his work, calling that "emotional and undisciplined approach," which he says interested him for two years only, "for the birds." (According to painter and former Bostonian Bernard Chaet, Pollock and de Kooning considered Bloom the first Abstract Expressionist.) He is interested primarily in a quality of spiritual resonance, like that found in Rembrandt, Blake, Turner and Indian painting. Bloom's latest works, shown last month at Terry Dintenfass in New York, are large-scale still lifes (the artist views them as abstractions) of ornate amphoras. These garish, exquisitely crafted vases seem the perfect vessels for Bloom's blend of fantasy and close observation, scintillating color and sure, free brushwork.

The Painters

On the first day of my reconnaissance mission, I was told that the Boston style is epitomized by the work of 38-year-old Roger Kizik. Soon afterwards, I discovered that there is no single dominating trend, and even if a case could be made for a single exemplary artist, it would certainly not be Kizik. Nonetheless, the remark was revealing of how far and in how many directions Boston art has diverged from the meticulously crafted realist oil paintings I was expecting.

After Hyman Bloom, Kizik seems to be Boston's best known, least seen artist. His mammoth paintings (10 by 20 feet is the norm) assembled from fake fur, feathers, plastic garlands, mylar strips, sequins, lingerie and much else, testify to Kizik's assertion that "anything will roll," when it comes to materials. Inspired by dreams, desires and personal experiences, these gigantic works are intensely private, cathartic statements scaled up to public dimensions. Their physicality and bravado—not to say vulgarity—have elicited comparisons to early Schnabel. But Kizik is less pedantic than Schnabel, less literary, more humorous. Formally, he seems more indebted to Pollock than to any of his peers. Despite affiliations with the Schlien and Stux galleries, Kizik has managed to sell a total of only three of his large works, an indication that they are still too big—in many respects—for Boston.

Another young artist coming to terms with autobiographical subject matter is Gerry Bergstein; his paintings are cocktails of illusionism, abstraction, Surrealism, late

Guston, written words and phrases. They are crammed with small floating everyday images: TVs, refrigerators, food, art, houses, airplanes, and beds juxtaposed in antic, disturbing ways. Transubstantiations are commonplace: a submarine sandwich becomes an airplane and is also an animal biting into a human being. Layered meaning is literalized by surface complexity—passages of paint applied in actual and illusionistic relief. Trompe-l'oeil frames serve as formal containers and mock-narrative devices. The attempt to control chaos is shown to be joyous, perilous absurdity.

Traditional realism has by no means faded from view in Boston. Like the so-called Brahmins, it has simply lost its monopoly. George Nick, Paul Georges (who commutes to Brandeis from New York), Barney Rubenstein and, at intervals, Michael Mazur are some of the leading practitioners. The torchbearer among younger artists is Richard Sheehan, who was lionized in the local press last winter for adhering to his plein-air painting schedule regardless of the weather. Sheehan portrays unassuming portions of the built landscape—highway exits and embankments, bridge underpasses, industrial flatlands—that are anonymous to the point of being emblematic. Sheehan's sensitive rendering accords them a bleak beauty.

Watercolor is another healthy local tradition. Until leaving for New York, Todd McKie was among Boston's foremost younger painters in the medium. There is more than a hint of Chicago funk in McKie's work—and in that of other Boston watercolorists, too. In this regard, Catherine Bertulli, who also makes beguilingly flimsy foam-core constructions, stands out as something of a maverick. Her saturated colors and densely packed forms conjure up Matisse and Nolde. Like her work in other mediums, the watercolors are witty, yet come straight from the heart.

The one stylistic mode which might arguably qualify as a trend among young Boston painters is a brand of large-scale figuration that would look perfectly at home in any "hot" New York gallery (except Metro Pictures—Bostonians are not—yet—lifting imagery directly from the media). Generally speaking, figures of herculean dimension are set within an abstract framework. For Louis Risoli, this compositional strategy is ideally suited to his subjects—body builders. Painted in lavish relief, the figures, cropped at the neck, dominate their flat, patterned grounds as body builders do a stage.

By contrast, Cliffton Peacock's abstracted, heroic nudes appear dwarfed by the implications of vast space and monumental architecture that surround them. Aaron Fink paints frontal, iconic images in series. His metaphorical motifs—isolated smoking men, cigars, clouds, breaking waves, chairs, cherries, cups and saucers—recall Guston. Their monumental proportions and weight project a looming mysterious force. The forms are simplified, the brushwork and coloration scumbled and sensuous.

In some ways, Doug Anderson is Boston's answer to David Salle. For both artists, the logic to the accrual and relationship of images is unspecified. The implied narrative—often sexual—is tenuous. Anderson's imagery, harsh palette and highly reflective surfaces are inspired by porno magazines; his violent, oblique themes, by rock music and the horrors of a post-industrial, nuclear age.

Marc Mannheimer's brightly painted shaped canvases allude to man's bestial nature. Animals shown in human situations and interacting with humans as if members of the same species produce a grotesque effect. For Mannheimer, man is also the "other."

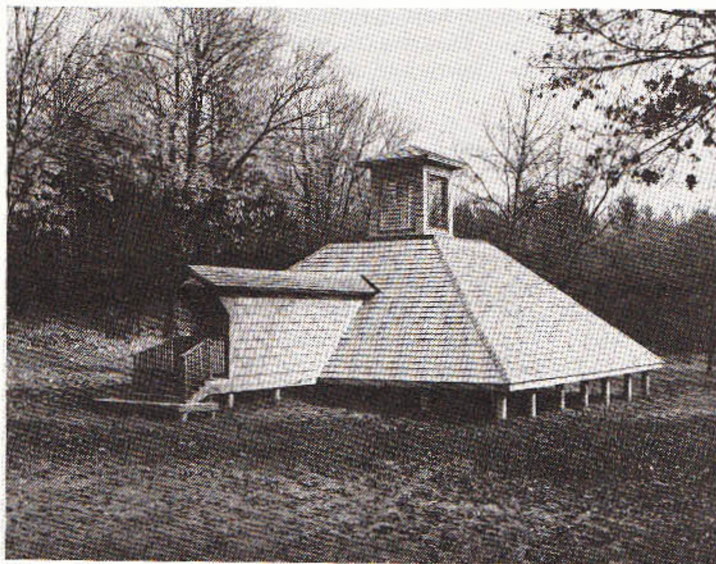
By barely perceptible steps, John McNamara, one of Boston's best-known abstract painters, is moving toward representation. Figurative elements are stealing into his covert landscapes. (Like Kizik's work, they tend to be outsize.) The brooding atmosphere of these paintings now has a referent, although their paint handling (McNamara uses a palette knife) remains essentially abstract. Occasional shrill tonal contrasts are the only incidents that interrupt—somewhat gratuitously—the paintings' otherwise contemplative expanses.

Natalie Alper's abstract paintings are both dynamic and lyrical. Evolved from a tight rhythmic calligraphy which recalls that of Hanne Darboven, Alper's diagonal strokes are now long and loose, and their accumulation over the white paper or canvas surface conveys the impression of plant forms on water. The paintings read as extended metaphors for gardens, growth and change, invoking the spirit of Monet.

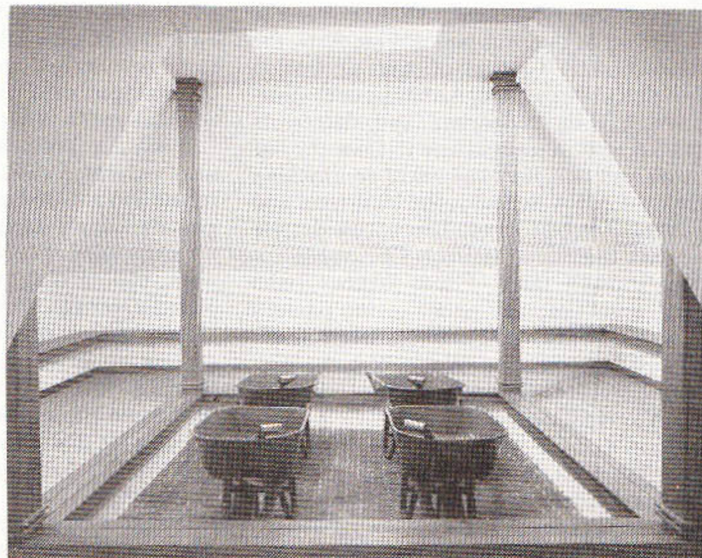
Some 30 abstract painters and sculptors have banded together (with the help of Ken Moffett) to share Greenbergian ideas about art. They meet periodically for professional critiques and hold sessions at which they spend a lot of time counseling each other where most effectively to crop their works. Among the painters, Frank Campion is the most accomplished and individual. As for the sculptors, many are barely out of the MFA School, where they appear to have concentrated hard on Gonzalez, Smith and Caro (which is precisely why they were invited to join the group.)

Sculpture, Installations, Public Art, etc.

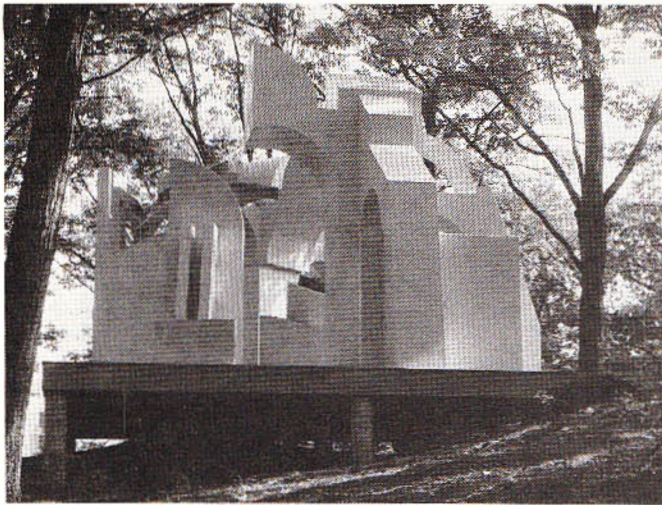
Unless I missed something (easily a possibility), Boston-area sculptors doing work of consequence can be counted on the fingers of one hand. A disproportionate number are involved in producing forms with overtones of archeology. Brenda Star models wax reliefs in the shape of Greek urns. Actually profile images, her objects are richly associative yet stubbornly confound all the historical interpretations they suggest. Mark Cooper is the only sculptor I encountered working fairly consistently



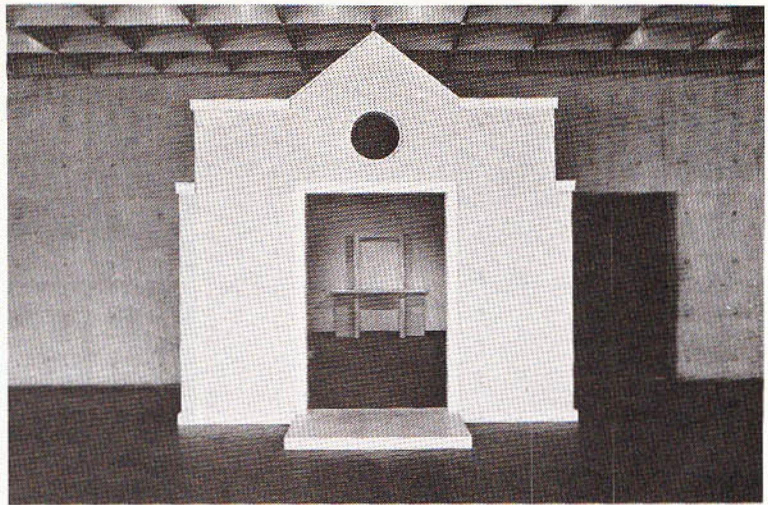
Michael Timpson:* Just Knock Three Times and Whisper Low, *1982, exterior, 40 by 40 by 25 feet. DeCordova Museum.



Michael Timpson:* Just Knock Three Times and Whisper Low, *1982, interior installation. DeCordova Museum.



Ed Rothfarb:* Istra, *1982, painted wood, 16 by 23 by 32 feet. Rose Art Museum.



Jeffrey Schiff:* Chapel/Exit, *1983, installation at Brown University, plaster, 13 by 13 by 33 feet.

on a large scale. His cast-cement pieces resemble excavated architectural fragments encrusted with bronze and ceramic shards. The rough surfaces bear contemporary hieroglyphs modeled in relief.

Discouraged by the narrow exposure she felt she was receiving, Mags Harries withdrew from the Boston gallery scene several years ago to devote her time to making public pieces. By focusing on vestiges of human presence, her work calls attention to its absence and to the passage of time. Her commemorative objects include such things as the remains of a meal, the impression of a hand, lost articles of clothing and, in her best known work (for Boston's Haymarket), refuse from a public marketplace. To fabricate the works, Harries simply casts found objects in plaster, which is then translated into bronze. Her latest commission, called *The Glove Cycle* (an homage to Max Klinger), consists of hundreds of single bronze gloves, in all shapes and sizes and configurations. They will be installed in a Cambridge subway station, on railings and the escalator median. A large heap of them will occupy an eerie corner.

The Glove Cycle is one of many works commissioned by the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority in conjunction with the construction or refurbishing of 15 public transit stations in Boston and Cambridge. Other artists participating in the project are Siah Armajani, Scott Burton, Sam Gilliam, Joyce Kozloff, Todd McKie, Ann Norton (whose piece was designed before she died last year), Christopher Sproat and Bostonians Carlos Dorian, Dmitri Hadzi, Gyorgy Kepes, Paul Matisse, Will Ryman, Jeffrey Schiff and James Tyler. About $1.5 million is allocated for the art.

Installation art (seen from time to time at Helen Schlien and Stux galleries) has few practitioners in Boston. Two of its three main exemplars, Jeffrey Schiff and Ed Rothfarb, have architectural backgrounds. In a series of recent pieces, Schiff has introduced scaled-down, plaster-block versions of columns, portals and other features of classical Roman and church architecture into modern (gallery) interiors—to simulate the historical compression the Romans achieved when they built on Etruscan sites. Rothfarb, more interested in architecture's narrative potential, has been making sculptures that relate closely to Alice Aycock's constructions from a few years back. A stronger theatricality has entered his new works, which resemble Constructivist stage sets that may, in the future, be embellished with figurative elements.

Michael Timpson's homages to laborers are laid out in grid formation, echoing the repetitive and accumulative nature of the tasks that workers perform. Miners, hospital, construction, and factory workers are the absent subjects of his rooms filled with orderly rows of pails and flashlights, beds, wheelbarrows and lunch tables. The wheelbarrow installation, a permanent outdoor commission for the DeCordova Museum, was also a kind of performance process piece. It took Timpson nearly a year to singlehandedly build the woodframe chapel-like structure that houses it.

The work of a number of Boston artists bespeaks a common concern for maintaining the integrity of life in a world that seems bent on its fragmentation or destruction. Alex Grey's painting series, *The Sacred Mirror*, in progress since 1979, is composed of life-size, minutely detailed diagrams of human physical, psychic and spiritual energy systems elaborated in Western science, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism and Sanskrit. (Grey is also a powerful performer; life, death and nuclear holocaust are the frequent focus of his performance pieces.) Allyson Grey (Alex's wife and performance collaborator) paints large abstract watercolors (the biggest so far is 24 feet long) composed of units containing 100 differently colored squares, each square representing a different color. Within each work, the scale and disposition of units and their component color squares vary widely, producing a look of random disorder. Yet anyone with patience will discover the works to be harmonic wholes.

Ralph Helmick's figurative sculptures are constructed from countless of sections of cut wood strips stacked up and laminated. The horizontal striations evidence the way in which the sculpture is built up, each constituting a piece of information essential to the whole. That Helmick's works look like the results of repeatable mechanical operations is no accident.

Karen Moss intrudes images of electronic circuitry, robots and other signs of technological prowess into her large watercolors of natural, often aquatic, environments. The messages behind such pointed juxtapositions of wildlife and artificial intelligence can hardly be mistaken.

In a city whose streets were laid out by cows, things change slowly, and people either learn to be patient or move on. The frenzy of New York is missing here, as are the external pressures to make art. As a result, the work seems in general more reflective, less urgent and finally, perhaps, less compelling. Boston doesn't offer New York's thrilling highs and abysmal lows—for one thing, the market won't support them. But no one expects—or particularly wants—Boston to beNew York. Not yet. □

1. Cleveland Amory, *The Proper Bostonians*, New York, E.P. Dutton, 1947, p. 18.
2. Ibid., p. 249.
3. Walter Muir Whitehill, *Museum of Fine Arts Boston: A Centennial History*, Cambridge, Mass., The Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1970, Vol. II, p. 507.
4. Ibid., p. 508.
5. Ibid., p. 507.
6. Ibid., p. 754.
7. Marjorie Phillips, *Duncan Phillips and His Collection*, New York, W.W. Norton & Co., revised edition 1982, p. 187.