

PERSPECTIVES

Revisiting new talent

By Christine Temin
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Every year the Alpha Gallery mounts a "New Talent" show, exhibiting work by several young discoveries. This year, as part of the celebration of its 20th anniversary, Alpha is also staging "New Talent Revisited," a then-and-now show juxtaposing one older and one newer work by each of seven painters who made their debuts in one or another of the "New Talent" series. The show is at Alpha, 121 Newbury St., through April 27.

The show's fascination springs from the obvious and gratifying progress each artist has made: The works have been selected with extreme care, to make that progress stand out. Scott Prior's 1973 "Observatory Triptych" is more gimmicky than his haunting 1988 "Morning Bedroom." The former is built around a tripart wooden frame that suggests an altarpiece, and carries the period idea along with Renaissance perspective and a receding beamed ceiling. Highly detailed everyday objects — a television, a Domino sugar box — bring the painting into the present, but the cool light suggests Dutch interiors. "Morning Bedroom," a hushed scene of a woman nursing a baby as a man looks on, shares that light and sense of quiet.

Frances Cohen Gillespie's 1970 "Self-Portrait With Pearls" is severe and flattened; her 1984 "Yellow Chrysanthemums With Satsumi Vase" has the same uncompromising air. Both David Humphrey's 1982 "Reception" and his 1988 "Civic Instrument" mix specific, although sometimes unidentifiable, objects against unspecific space. John Moore's two works are connected formally: His 1972-3 "Still Life With Commemorative Plate" is a view from above of a narrow table and its contents; the verticality is repeated in a different subject in the aerial 1987 view of "Crown St.," a drab back lot.



Detail from Richard Sheehan's "Wagon Wheel Cafe."

The lower half of the face in Aaron Fink's 1979 "Smoker In Polka Dot Shirt" is hidden by a hand; the face in Fink's 1988 "Poker Player" is also obscured, but the handling of paint, tight and monochromatic in the "Smoker," is free and lush in the later work. Richard Sheehan's 1977 "Wagon Wheel Cafe" is a brightly lit scene of a ramshackle building, with sharp patches of light and shade. His "Bridge - 88" takes light and shade to the point where they become the dominant, and virtually abstract, subject. Richard Ryan's 1976 "A Very Melodramatic Still Life" is a surreal jumble of elements — colossal lightbulb, potatoes falling from on high — while his 1988 "Grill" is orange-on-orange, giving off a glow and suggesting that fire overwhelms everything.

What's nice about this show, in addition to the chance to compare and contrast, is that it defines the gallery's taste. There is no pure abstraction here. These paintings all have strong ties to the observable world, but once having established connections, the artists feel free to rearrange the world in highly personal ways.