

Boston's top gallery exhibits Painting's power led the way in strong shows



Michael Mazur: Black Paintings, "Mindless", April 30 - June 7, 2011.

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The Boston gallery scene has gotten some bad press lately. Globe critic Sebastian Smee called it anemic; a story in The New York Times termed it the weakest part of Boston's contemporary art scene. It's true that the number of galleries presenting top-flight contemporary art has dropped in recent years. The struggling economy has left its mark.

But in 2011, there has been no lack of strong shows - in particular strong painting shows. Paintings are the mainstay of commercial galleries; they're easier to sell than video or installation art. This year, many exhibitions demonstrated a fresh, deep, continued exploration of where painting has come from and what it can be. There have also been a handful of exhibits put together with such thought and care, they would make small museum shows.

There was a familiar fervor, not to mention sheer virtuosity, in the late Michael Mazur's show "Black Paintings" at Barbara Krakow Gallery. Mazur died in 2009. He made these works in 2007, contemplating the moral ravages of war. Plucking an extensive array of techniques from his toolbox, including layering, stenciling, dripping, and air-brushing, Mazur created deep, breathable space packed with nightmarish imagery and a magical interplay of light and shadow.

BARBARA

KRAKOW GALLERY