

Boston's top gallery exhibits

Painting's power led the way in strong shows



Shellburne Thurber's "9 Wellington Street: Backyard with statue and gazebo", March 19 - April 26, 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.

"Shellburne Thurber: '9 Wellington Street' was an exquisite solo show by the Boston-area photographer at Barbara Krakow Gallery. Thurber documented the ornate, decrepit South End home of her friend Ralph Horne. Each photograph was lush with light filtering through dust and lavish appointments, and the installation itself was deep and haunting, leading viewers through doors, down hallways, or right into looking glasses. Horne was in none of the images, but the sumptuous and decaying details of his life were, and that's what Thurber has always done well - evoking absence through detail.

BARBARA

KRAKOW GALLERY