



Julian Opie, *I dreamt I was driving my car (country road)*.
Courtesy Barbara Krakow Gallery.



Oscar Palacio, *Grass Over Asphalt*.
Courtesy Elias Fine Art.

Critic's Picks: Boston

Miller Block Gallery: Philip Gaston Prints: The Gemini Project, March 14–April 9; Howard Yezerksi Gallery: Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons, April 25–May 27; Elias Fine Art: Impressions of a Revolution: New Prints, March 6–April 26; Bernard Toale Gallery: Abelardo Morell/Jocelyn Lee, May 20–June 28.

Boston:

Boston is a city of such venerable art institutions as the Museum of Fine Arts and the Harvard University Art Museums, places best-known for their historic collections, making the activity generated by its contemporary galleries all the more vital to the local art community. The most vibrant galleries serve as foils to the city's formal and traditional exterior, giving space to its unexpected, progressive undercurrents.

In the South End, a neighborhood marked by hip restaurants and Victorian bowfronts, a renovated industrial space at 450 Harrison Avenue is the center of much gallery action. When Bernard Toale relocated his space from Newbury Street to the South End in 1998, a number of young dealers and artists followed suit. **Bernard Toale Gallery** has a prominent location on the ground floor of the Harrison Avenue building, with OSP Gallery (owned by Open Studios Press), Allston Skirt Gallery, Clifford-Smith Gallery, Gallery Katz, and others on upper floors. Toale represents a smart cross-section of established and emerging artists working in all media, from **David Hilliard** and **Penelope Umbrico** to **Arlene Schecht** and **Roxy Paine**. The gallery is currently in the midst of an expansion, and will

reopen this spring with several exhibitions, including one showing photographic work by **Abelardo Morell** and **Jocelyn Lee** (see “Critic’s Picks” for dates). Until recently, Open Studios Press used the OSP Gallery to promote artists featured in its periodical *New American Paintings*. However, an unexpected delay in production presented an opportunity for the gallery's director, Steven Zevitas, to organize “The Fall Line: Intuition and Necessity in Contemporary Abstract Drawing,” a small gem of a show featuring works on paper by eleven American artists. The exhibition considered the multiple permutations of abstraction, from the obsessively worked ink drawings of **Jacob El Hanani** to the tightly contained yet expressive brushwork of **Sharon Loudon** and the spare geometric constructions of **Bronlyn Jones Allston Skirt Gallery**, operated by **Randi Hopkins** and **Beth Kantrowitz**, offers a wonderfully eccentric program of new work. This winter, the gallery presented “Taqueria Cancun: The San Francisco Hook-up,” featuring emerging artists from the Bay Area. One wonders how traditionally conservative Boston viewers might perceive the edgier Bay Area scene from this selection, but there were a few exceptional pieces that should translate well anywhere, including the exquisitely rendered diagram-

matic drawings of **Ben Peterson**.

Across town, in an industrial stretch of Allston, **Elias Fine Art** is a perpetually bright spot for contemporary work in all media. This winter, the gallery mounted “Asphalt,” curated by **Joseph Carroll**, a spare group exhibition that presented a surprisingly poetic interpretation of the most ubiquitous material imaginable. With a few notable exceptions—such as the 1952 short film *Blacktop* by **Charles and Ray Eames**, and **Ed Ruscha's** book *34 Parking Lots* (1967)—“Asphalt” primarily featured photographs. Among them were one of **Todd Hido's** luminous night photographs of a lonely stretch of road, and a terse observation of urban dissonance by **Oscar Palacio**, showing new sod being planted over a blacktop driveway.

The well-heeled stretch of Newbury Street just off the Public Garden is the site of some of the more prominent galleries. While the long-established **Robert Klein Gallery** is devoted exclusively to modern and contemporary photography, most of the Newbury galleries represent a range of contemporary artists. This winter, **Miller Block Gallery** presented new landscapes by photographer **Scott Peterman**. Working in his native New England and in Iceland, Peterman gravitates to hazy, atmospheric light conditions, bringing a superbly controlled

color palette and a refined, minimalist aesthetic to vast spaces. Next door, **Howard Yezerksi Gallery** showed **Amanda Means's** photographic studies of industrial light bulbs. In a rich treatise on the infinite possibilities of light and form, Means isolates the familiar shape as an iconic, sculptural object. **Barbara Krakow Gallery** displayed a selection of **Julian Opie's** ecstatically flat and stylized landscapes. These computer-generated images were actually derived from photographs that were in turn scanned and reduced to their most basic, symbolic guises. Opie's Pop-inspired imagery is faintly comical in its language of neatly reducible, universal forms.

It bodes well for the Boston art scene that so many new galleries have sprung up in recent years and that they seem to be thriving. A healthy collegial exchange is also evident among a relatively concentrated number of contemporary art supporters. Artists exhibiting or in residence at one of the city's institutions might also be the subjects of gallery exhibitions and related programs. Such arrangements seem to go beyond the obvious economic advantages of coordinating programming; rather, they reflect a larger effort to sustain an audience for contemporary art in a city more traditionally known for its enthusiasm for historic art and culture—and for the Red Sox. □