

TAB ARTS & more

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A mix of 'New Talent' at Alpha Gallery

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Intent is more evident than realization in "New Talent," on display at Boston's Alpha Gallery through July 2. This year's version of the annual tradition highlights two recent graduates from local art schools, and two artists being introduced for the first time to Boston.

One artist, Kay Ives, fulfills her intention. Ives, who completed the Fifth Year Program at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in 1997, says that she wants her work to deal with "impermanence, incompleteness and imperfection." Her pieces in the show were inspired by the philosophy of John Cage, and they act as a memorial for last February's fire in Waltham that destroyed several studios, including that of violin maker Jerry Weene.

Ives' "Suite" is a standout. Comprising six drawings on paper hung together in a grid, their medium is smoke. The silhouette of a violin body emits a veil of vapor. A flurry of bows angles through mist. A violin's cross-section is apparently burning itself to the core.

Remarkably, we seem to be witnessing the instruments in the process of self-immolation. The lovely charcoal wisps of color, their deli-

cate smears, make the drawings tread the line between the holy and profane.

Her other mixed-media pieces play with charred fragments of sheet music on a vast, waxy surface. In one, a black thread knots them together evocatively. In another, a bow is suspended below the canvas, where it grasps a shocking handful of horsehair.

Honour Mack, who graduated from the Yale University School of Art in 1990, has exhibited in the region but never in Boston. In her current series of abstract oils, she's seeking a new approach to landscape. Her alternative is based on mapping, in which she builds up intuitive layers that reference aerial views, both actual and imagined.

The results are rich. Through a bluish haze of cloud, we can catch a glimpse of an undulation of sienna hills. Part of a map grid floats into view. Everything is smoky and half-fixed, as if the artist is trying to determine the coordinates of a landscape from an airplane. Yet one senses her territory for the project has been staked out, but not completely explored. It's a great idea that needs pushing.

"New Talent" is also the first exhibition in Boston by Kathy Moss, who has shown for

several years in New York. She studied at the New York Studio School through 1989. Moss declares that her renderings of seed pods and shells are "situational haiku, a tightly held moment, a fleeting instant in a visual language."

Her five small oils on linen point in that direction. In them, a couple of dandelions or group of pods are captured off-center in muted browns and greens. But so far there's no haiku-like "A-ha!" when contradictory elements merge in a surprisingly right way.

Equally cautious are the primitive impastos of Joseph Wardwell, who recently completed his MFA at Boston University. Though on the surface his studio self-portraits could be viewed as violently narcissistic, just plain defiant to the point of self-mythologizing — with the artist in sideburns looking back at us from a mirror, above a tabletop cluster of hunting knife and Jack Daniels, a pack of smokes and pair of shades, all squeezed out in globs of vermilion and cobalt — they end up looking young and stupid. Maybe we don't get it and he's poking fun at himself in a Sid Vicious, Van Gogh kind of way. But we don't care enough to figure it out. If they're meant to be in-your-face, they