

Remaking history by themselves



Artists try to rattle our staid perspectives

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DANIELA RIVERA: Growth At: LaMontagne Gallery, 555 East 2d St., South Boston. 617-464-4640, www.lamontagnegallery.com

TARAVAT TALEPASAND: The Corrupt Minority At: Steven Zevitas Gallery, 450 Harrison Ave. Through May 28. 617-778-5265, www.stevenzevitasgallery.com

GREGORY WRIGHT: Macrocosm/ Microcosm? — A Fantastic Voyage

At: Galatea Fine Art, 460 Harrison Ave., 617-542-1500, www.galateafineart.com

Some artists simply make beautiful things. Others strive to understand beauty within the framework of art history and contemporary art. These more conceptual artists — such as Daniela Rivera, who has a show at LaMontagne Gallery, and Taravat Talepasand, at Steven Zevitas Gallery — make art that is striking in part because it shakes us out of our old and steady ideas.

Rivera's installation "Growth" at LaMontagne Gallery is beautiful and funny, if a bit intellectually laborious. Rivera was a finalist for the 2010 James and Audrey Foster Prize at the Institute of Contemporary Art; her piece in the Foster Prize show comprised a sky painting unfurling down the wall and onto the floor, with elements of a Turkish carpet design splattering across it.

"Growth" nods to environmental artist Richard Long's "A Line Made by Walking," a 1967 conceptual work that entailed the artist "drawing" in a field by walking back and forth across it.

Rivera seeks to engage the viewer in space in a similar way, inside the white cube of the gallery. She has created dozens of 2-foot-square realist paintings of grass, and arranged them in a tight grid on the wall. The installation spills onto the floor, where more canvases lie flat, some singly, and some stacked — you can see the dried paint that has dripped down their sides. Pathways are built into the floor grid so you can navigate around the installation. The piece lands the viewer somewhere between scruffy backyard and artsy white cube, and that's deliciously disconcerting.

There are two other bodies of work in the show, which gallery staff say are part of the "Growth" installation, and here is where it becomes strained. "Labored Landscape," a three-channel video, features Rivera pushing a ball of snow up a hill, a too-obvious quote of Long's work.

The "Accidental Sky" series of 5-by-7-inch paintings features sky imagery, which has often shown up in Rivera's work. Their small scale creates a lovely counterpoint to the sheer volume of the grass paintings. But Rivera has splattered, stained, or affixed stuff to each of these pieces. Maybe she intended the stains to interrupt the illusion of sky, and assert the maker's presence. But it seems an unnecessary and over-thought gesture in an exhibit that already artfully breaks a lawn into a modernist grid.