

# Making their concepts accessible

## Hargadon and Gustainis works show wry intent

By Cate McQuaid  
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Bring up conceptual art, and some people's eyes glaze over. So before we dive into the conceptual underpinnings of the work of Thomas

Gustainis and Geoff Hargadon now up at Gallery Kayafas, let's say this: It's funny, wry, and self-mocking — accessible on many levels.

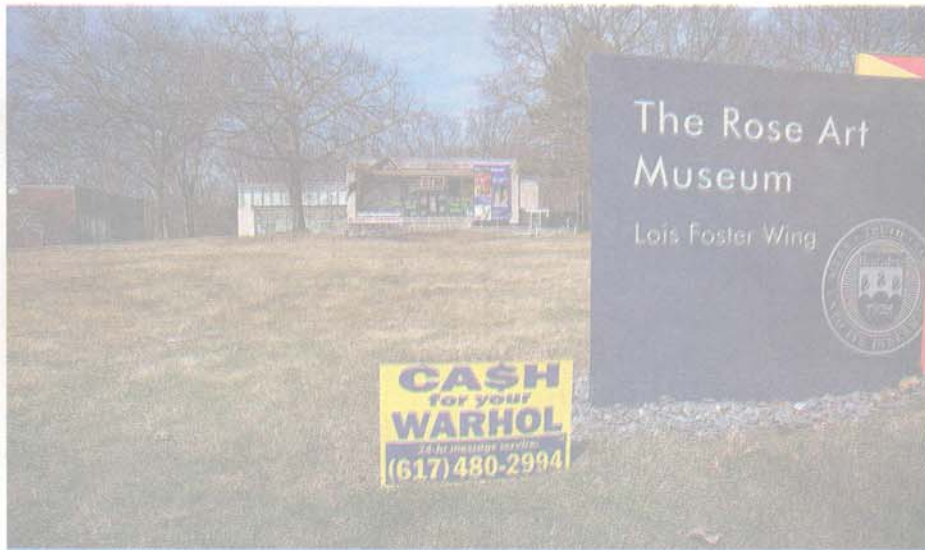
Hargadon's "Dealers Protected!" features signs that he has put up, first around Boston and then during the Frieze Art Fair in London in October, and during Art Basel Miami Beach earlier this month. Perhaps you have seen them. They read "Cash for Your Warhol." This show features the signs themselves, and photos of them in situ.

The artist, who is an unlikely hybrid of street artist and senior vice president at the financial services company UBS, was inspired by the "cash for your house" signs he saw on telephone poles during the worst of the economic collapse. He hilariously posted his first "Cash for Your Warhol" sign outside the Rose Art Museum at Brandeis in 2009, after the museum announced controversial — and later canceled — plans to close and sell off its collection. In a single stroke, Hargadon marries the cash-strapped with the cushy collector. Can they be one and the same? The Rose certainly is a case in point.

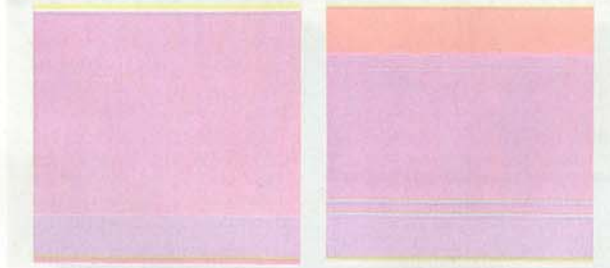
Gustainis similarly unpacks our relationship to money and value. He filled a gallery wall with a collection of handmade signs taken from various yards that read "Free" and photos of some of the free stuff — a plastic leg cast, lacy panties, and more. He painted and drew on the signs with iconic fonts and imagery — there's one in the fashion of Robert Indiana's LOVE sculpture — and others borrow from tattoos and roadside stands.

Of course, the signs are not free, and the cost is part of the conceit. They all go for \$150 to \$500 except a large one with a skull, which is priced "\$12,000 or best offer!"

Another project examines the



Geoff Hargadon posted his first "Cash for Your Warhol" sign in 2009. Below: Shay Kun's oil on canvas "Austerity," and Rose Olson's acrylic on wood veneer diptych "Moving Mist."



contemporary art world's drive for the new. Gustainis has simply stamped "NEW WORK" on photos — of someone raking leaves, of a used takeout container. It's ridiculous and comic, skewering the art world's self-seriousness. The artist also offers a table full of retail items such as mugs, plates, and gift baskets emblazoned with "free" and "new work" logos. The free ones, by the way, are the more expensive.

### Real, surreal territories

Shay Kun's paintings at LaMontagne Gallery pop off the wall. Kun is first and foremost a craftsman, concerned with coaxing beauty out of palette and brush stroke. His sun-blessed landscapes purposefully recall Hudson River School paintings. In the past, he has disrupted his gorgeous scenes with suggestions of violence.

This show displays a social

conscience, exploring the disconnect between nature's beauty and the ugliness and lack of caring displayed by humans: "Austerity" sets a man sleeping against plastic bags on a park bench against a breathtaking glimmer-glass lake.

The exhibit also ventures into intriguing surreal territory. Many of Kun's paintings feature hot air balloons. These are based on a toy the artist's parents brought to Israel after surviving the Holocaust, according to art dealer Russell LaMontagne. They are inevitably signals of hope.

"No Regrets" shows three of them hovering above a lake, their plump reflections shimmering. Kun has painted a jewel-like cityscape, which reads like the balloons' audience. The background is wild, full of big, dripping purple icicles and ribbons of blue-green and red that describe mountains.

"Cosmic Cocktail" features a waterfall in the distance and people admiring it from a bridge, but the payoff of this painting is the impact of a single droplet on the water's surface in the foreground. There, the rippling water is a receptacle of light, mirroring the primary colors of a balloon overhead. Kun may simply be employing the balloons because they present delicious painterly challenges. But thematically, they are opening a door into something more mysterious than he has yet painted.

**THOMAS J. GUSTAINIS:**  
An Accruing Mass of (dis)Content:

**A Thomas J. Gustainis Retrospective**  
**GEOFF HARGADON:**  
Dealers Protected!  
At: Gallery Kayafas,  
450 Harrison Ave.,  
through Jan. 7. 617-482-0411,  
www.gallerykayafas.com

**SHAY KUN: Rebreather**  
At: LaMontagne Gallery,  
555 East 2d St., South Boston,  
through Jan. 7. 617-464-4640,  
www.lamontagnegallery.com

**JENNIFER MOSES:**  
Roswell: New Work  
**ROSE OLSON: Doubles**

At: Kingston Gallery,  
450 Harrison Ave.,  
through Jan. 1. 617-423-4113,  
www.kingstongallery.org

### Mesmerizing colors

Boston painter Jennifer Moses spent a year at the Roswell Artist-in-Residence Program in New Mexico. Her new show at Kingston Gallery spotlights work she did there. The paintings teem with color, concentric lines, amoeba-like forms, and beams that radiate outward from the center. She populates "Spiderman's Elbow" with striated puddles of colors that conjoin and wheel over the surface, bobbling over gray rays and bumping into loops. There's a spinning quality to most of these works, a motion that never stops, but it's not dizzying — it's both expansive and centering.

Also up at Kingston, Rose Olson offers nuanced, luminous paintings on wood veneer, mounted on boxes that stand off the wall. Olson layers one transparent color over another. The wood grain remains visible, but showered with light. I especially like the pieces in which the color shifts are almost imperceptible, such as "Come and Go," featuring broad bands of two pinks. She also uses straps of distinctively different color to contain areas of translucence — "Moving Mist" has thin bands of yellow and orange. But it's the evanescent veils of hues that — like Kun's references to the Hudson River School — evoke the sublime.

Cate McQuaid can be reached at [catemcquaid@gmail.com](mailto:catemcquaid@gmail.com).