

RANDALL BECK GALLERY

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P E R S P E C T I V E S

By Christine Temin
Globe Staff

Teasing contradictions about space lurk in Ilana Manolson's big pastel/collage pieces, at the Randall Beck Gallery, 168 Newbury St., through October 15. Manolson presents fractured architecture in these new works that are larger and less coy than her earlier ones. She once did charming little paper pieces that depicted exploding boxes; now she's more interested in stairwells, and her work is the more powerful for the shift in scale. She's now capable of creating swirling, hallucinatory spaces, filled with flying staircases that go unanchored to floors: To climb these stairs is to walk the plank.

In the large "inside/Outlook," Manolson uses overlapping, ragged-edged sheets of paper that spell out shallowness, while a pastel drawing of a steeply descending staircase pulls the viewer into deep space. Manolson's lush colors - here a peach and plum palette - are captivating from across the room, and pull the viewer into a closer inspection of her spatial puzzles.

A less elusive subject than her slippery spaces is the urban dirt and decay that Manolson's new works depict. Smudgy passages are rubbings from real city brick, but here the soot, smoke and grime are transformed into a richly attractive play of textures. A work called "Urban Ruin" unites Manolson's spaces and textures particularly well, with a faint grid, shadows and light all adding drama to the flat, torn papers that suddenly turn into a vertiginous view of a staircase.

"Writing on the Wall" is a piece of urban archeology, its sense of dirt, age and accumulation built with layer upon layer of shredded flyers and advertisements that could have come from a city fence or telephone pole. "Turning the Corner I" is a complete contrast. This work is a pastel without collage elements, and the restraint in the choice of medium helps to create a calm and contemplative air.

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■ HIGHLIGHTS

Exploding houses, endless series of archways and stairways going nowhere are some of Ilana Manolson's favorite images. The spaces in Manolson's large pastel collages are topsy-turvy, with planes slicing into each other with no apparent logic. Adding to the appeal of the work are her luscious, smudgy, gritty colors and her oddly effective combinations of fragments of drawings, rubbed impressions of urban walls and scraped fragments of fliers posted in public areas. Manolson, a young Boston artist, is on sabbatical in New York, but her recent work is at the Randall Beck Gallery on Newbury Street through

Oct. 15.

Another notable young talent having a solo show this season is T. Wiley Carr, who often paints on objects with a history, old windows being a favorite. Dark and elusive, Carr's inky paintings feature recurring characters and situations - a man in a fedora and a tornado crop up repeatedly - and strange narratives erupting in odd corners. Boston's Alpha Gallery introduced Carr to the public in 1986, and this year, the gallery presents his work in a show that runs from Dec. 10 to Jan. 4.

- CHRISTINE TEMIN