



Mix and match

By Cate McQuaid, Globe Correspondent | March 2, 2006

Painter Chris Martin's split-personality show at the Bernard Toale Gallery pairs his monumental geometrical abstractions with a cozy installation of Persian rugs, bongo drums, and walls cluttered with newspaper clippings, snapshots, and small paintings by Martin and some of his favorite artists. He's attempting to show the meandering path of his imagination and how it leads to his big canvases, which have their roots in Pop, Minimalism, and Abstract Expressionism. There's something sweet about the effort, but the details of Martin's life distract from the experience of his big, bold paintings, which could speak well enough for themselves if hung on their own.

Thomas Allen's color photographs, also at Toale, are witty and laugh-out-loud funny. In contrast to Martin's oeuvre, they have the depth of a penny. Even so, they're so clever and beautifully printed, they're hard not to love. Allen takes dime-store novels, slices out pieces of their illustrated covers, and bends those slivers into three-dimensional action. For instance, "Stacked" has a woman wearing only a blanket and a come-hither look reclining atop a stack of paperbacks. In "Bookend," the slain cowboy from the cover of one book sprawls on the ground before the gunslinger bent from the cover of another. It's pulp fiction, reinvigorated.