



Untitled work by Dan Devine at Mobius Gallery.

Globe staff photo/George Rizer

Oasis of calm not just illusion

By Christine Temin
Globe Staff

Helen Shlien, who has owned and operated two Boston galleries specializing in adventurous work but has been absent from the art scene for the past year or so, is back — as curator of the Installation Project at Mobius, an alternative space at 354 Congress St. Coincidentally, the Congress Street space was the site of Shlien's first gallery. She has invited four artists to create installations for Mobius' two big rooms: Works by Meredith Davis and Dan Devine are up through Jan. 24; works by Ewa Kuryluk and Bart Uchida will follow, Jan. 31 - Feb. 21.

Davis turns the light and airy front room into an oasis of calm interrupted only by the gentle fluttering of pale white gauzy panels which float from the ceiling. It is easy to get pleasantly lost in this inviting forest. On its floor is a thick layer of peat moss that eliminates the noise of visitors' feet, which sink into the springy medium. The fabric panels are perfectly at home with the room's white-painted brick walls and ceiling. The effect is pure, neutral and soothing.

Light plays an important role in this environment, whose simplicity throws spots of sunlight or lengthening shadows into high relief. The vertical white blinds on the windows become part of the work, casting striped shadows which cut across the room. A row of white folding chairs is placed so

that visitors will look squarely through the windows, seeing fragments of a view. On a pedestal at the front of the rows of fabric panels is a plain white bowl, which seems to await some ritualistic purpose. The rumbling of trucks on Congress Street is audible, but seems very far away; the visitor is sheltered from outside reality.

In the heart of the forest is a shallow pit filled with black coal. On top of the coal are tree branches, stripped of their leaves, and dried fish. The materials suggest vast amounts of time, substances gradually breaking down and changing, the cyclical nature of life.

The only flaw in Davis' work is that its aims are so similar to so many other installations. The serene, temple-like place is a staple which ought to be varied more, and more often.

Devine's work is puzzling. There are two elements: On the walls are geometric, two-dimensional galvanized steel shapes; ribbed, fanning forms join rounded and squarish ones. The shiny results are bold, blunt and powerful. In the center of the room are eight rectangular columns, each a different height, appearing, at a distance, to be marble and granite but turning out to be plastic laminate: The cheap, man-made substance robs the totem-like forms of their dignity. The columns are extremely static, the steel pieces explosive, and the contrast is about all there is to the piece. According to the show's literature, shadows and reflections are sup-

posed to play a big part in the work: They don't. □

The group show at the Stavardis Gallery, 73 Newbury St., through Jan. 31, is notable for fine work by several painters in the gallery's stable. John McNamara, one of Boston's most gifted young abstract painters, offers a satisfying diptych, "Whisper and Mulch," which takes his previous style in a new direction. McNamara is best known for large paintings filled with striated lines colliding in Olympian contests; although abstract, the paintings suggested landscapes. A while back, McNamara experimented by adding figures to his work. The experiment failed, but the new work shows him back on track. The new paintings are smaller, suggesting domestic interiors rather than grand outdoor spaces, and the forms, still composed of striations, have been edited down to just a few, which allows them breathing room and creates a new calm. The most immediately striking aspect of these paintings is that each is dominated by a single, carefully chosen and unabashedly attractive color, enriched by glints of other shades. "Whisper" is a pale, icy blue; "Mulch" is an invigorating spring green.

Alfonse Borysewicz, Adam Cvi-janovic, and Joyce Loughran also contribute particularly strong paintings to this show. Borysewicz' "Three Blind Mice" features a trio of men's shoes, thinly outlined and seen from above, plodding rhythmically forward on a thinly painted, murky brown surface, as if on a pilgrimage.