

THE BOSTON GLOBE

Arts & Reviews

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Chuck Webster: Messengers: Recent Work

At: osp gallery, 450 Harrison Ave.,
through June 2. 617-778-5265,
ospgallery.com

Abstract punch

Williams, Warshauer, and Chuck Webster, who has a show of paintings and works on paper up at osp gallery, share an aesthetic: They each make art with retinal punch, clever design, and luscious colors.

Webster's an abstract painter in the tradition of Arthur Dove — color, form, and spontaneity predominate. In a series of paintings on antique paper, the spinning, pulsing biomorphic forms he specializes in make a sweet contrast with their sometimes tattered and stained backgrounds. The shapes — a pink xylophone fading into the distance, a whirling mandala with golf-club spokes — come across as homely, yet catalyzing.

The works on canvas feel more finished, yet they, too, are full of surprises. For all their sheen, there's often a soft edge of discomfort and imperfection. "Big Grab" looks like a wavering pinwheel of yellow and white with red-tipped nodes against a blue ground. Look again, and it's clear that blue "ground" was painted over concentric circles to create the pinwheel: Webster flips figure and ground on their heads.

The showpiece of the exhibit is "Messenger," in which three candy-cane bands swell and narrow, pendulously undulating toward one another, held by voluptuous brackets of reds, against a Pepto-Bismol ground. Blue tips two of those bands, and it didn't occur to me until I'd left the gallery that there was a red-white-and-blue reference in that peppermint stick of a canvas. "Messenger" hovers between Op Art, with its winking stripes and bright tones, and something disturbingly fleshy and messily alive; it's a lovely tension.