

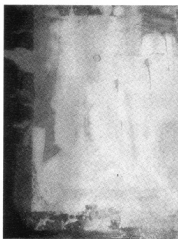
REGIONAL REVIEWS

Massachusetts

Boon Gallery/Salem, MA

www.boon-gallery.com

SHAWN SNOW



Shawn Snow, *Tar Edge*, oil and alkyd on canvas, 48 x 36". Photo: Lenz Photography.

Abstract painting may never again be what it was in the mid-twentieth century under the watchful, sometimes oppressive eye of Greenberg and his devotees. But despite formalism's critical downfall, many artists continue to explore the rich possibilities inherent in their chosen media. Shawn Snow's exhibition at Boon Gallery in Salem bore clear witness to this continued fascination.

Snow is an abstract painter, and his work has detectable affinities with past masters, most notably those of the New York School. But whereas many abstract expressionists regarded color as transcendent, Snow's colors often feel taken from the earth. Colors are never "pure" in these paintings, rather they are always tar blacks, pollen yellows, or faded denim blues.

Red Lake is one of his best; it's warmly luminous like candlelight, but its surface is as brittle as cracked leather. Looking closely at any of Snow's paintings is to let your gaze fly over a lunarlike topography that here and there surprises with spidery fissures, craters, sand, and stone. This dynamic interplay between Snow's flat colors and his more dimensional surfaces is a pivotal feature in his most successful work. In *Tar Edge* a hot lumpen band of deep black frames a radiant expanse of orange-yellow ochre like an up-close shot of a river of molten lava.

Snow is an old-school painter, but less so for his style than for his broad understanding of paint and painting's properties. This knowledge, and his facility with it, is what extends beyond the trivial borderlines that divide representational painting from abstraction. This knowledge connects his work to the tradition of painting itself, a language that despite critical fashion remains ever seductive. *Jonathan Fardy*