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Regarding the video monitor as a painting

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Daniel Phillips has made his studio floor his canvas. It's a simple conceit; he sets a camera on the ceiling, and it shoots the floor at regular intervals. He has strung thousands of these still photos together into stop-motion videos to create absorbing, surprisingly fresh art.

It would be easy to categorize Phillips's ambitious three-part series of "Bird's Eye" videos at Judi Rotenberg Gallery as performance video. He does show up in the frame. But these works only fleetingly address the human form. Instead, they ingeniously invite the viewer to treat the video monitor as a painting. All that happens within addresses painterly issues of surface, depth, abstraction, composition, and collage.

"Bird's Eye, Chapter 1" sports the most paint, as Phillips splatters and sashes the floor with it. The viewer watches each passage evolve, so we know how he does it. Even so, when he steps away, what we see is an abstract painting, lush, textured, and wittily composed. While sticking to his own vision, Phillips happily nods in these passages to Pollock, Rothko, and Rauschenberg.

Rauschenberg had to be an inspiration for "Bird's Eye, Chapter 2," in which the artist makes what looks like a collage by building a pile of stuff, rising higher and higher toward the camera. "Bird's Eye, Chapter 3" is the most attentive to composition and shape; we watch the circle of a trash barrel (sometimes beautifully illuminated), the angled lines of a ladder, and the stray orange loop of an electrical cord move over the space.

Phillips orients each of his video monitors vertically, and he positions them side by side, which helps us stop thinking of them as video monitors. He props them against the wall; if they were lying on the floor, our view would too closely mimic the camera's position. If they were hanging on the wall, we'd be in a familiar gallery stance. Standing on the floor, they disarm us; in the moment before we orient and figure out what's going on, the imagery carries us away.

The three stand side by side, although



COURTESY THE ARTIST AND JUDI ROTENBERG GALLERY

A still from "Bird's Eye, Chapter 1" by Daniel Phillips.

the artist considers them separate pieces, and together they captivate with odd juxtapositions. Each runs 25 to 35 minutes, long enough to surprise again and again.

The artist has other, more typical performance videos on view, also made with still photos. Both use light and reflection like sugar. It's hard to resist them, but they're an easy buzz. Still, "Drawing With Light" captivates beyond the light show; in

it, the nude artist interacts with a couple of paintings, setting his own figure against the ones on canvas. It sounds cheesy, but it turns out to be startlingly effective.

Phillips receives his graduate degree from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts this year. He's going places.

Abstract, rhythmic works

Painter Jered Sprecher starts with images he finds elsewhere, expanding

DANIEL PHILLIPS: Inherent Tendencies Toward Disorganization
At: Judi Rotenberg Gallery, 130 Newbury St., through June 6. 617-437-1518, www.judirotenberg.com

JERED SPRECHER: Recent Work
At: Steven Zevitas Gallery, 450 Harrison Ave., through June 13. 617-778-5265 (ext. 22), www.stevenzevitasgallery.com

MICHAEL SCHULTHEIS: Conic Symmetries
At: Chase Gallery, 129 Newbury St., through May 30. 617-859-7222, www.chasegallery.com

them beyond recognition into abstract, rhythmic works that often shift dizzily between deep space and painterly surface in his show at Steven Zevitas Gallery.

The dramatic "Inbild" feels like the crash of cymbals and looks like the opening of a universe. Four striated panels rush deep into the painting's center. Their white stripes appear opaque, their black stripes translucent, allowing us to glimpse more dramatic diagonals in the background. Mixed in with this almost sci-fi evocation of deep space, Sprecher has flat, brushy passages that say, almost laconically, "Hey, this is just a painting."

"Projection" features a silver lattice-work, like several layers of spider webs, and Sprecher has filled the gaps between the lines with painterly gold, blue, and black. It offers more delicious uncertainty, evoking both spatial depth and textured, appealing surface.

Light, depth, atmosphere

You might never know that painter Michael Schultheis has taken the cone as his subject. In his show at Chase Gallery, his fiery, vaporous works, such as "Conics of Apollonius 03," feature nothing that clear or solid. Instead, they take off from mathematical notations and sketches that describe a cone's form and motion. The artist used to work at Microsoft, where he spent time scribbling calculations on a whiteboard.

In his paintings, you can see the traces of those calculations — stray numbers, arcing parentheses. Mostly, they flutter and take flight like startled birds. Schultheis captures the moment of coalescence when the abstract symbols of an equation spark into something else: deeper meaning, a leap of the imagination.

He plays with light, depth, and atmosphere; each work is lighter at the center, as if some explosion of inspiration has occurred. Schultheis is deft with his brush, and his gestures dance. But there's a sameness to all the works here, which differ in size and palette but otherwise flutter, roil, and burn alike. A moment of inspiration is one thing; when repeated 17 times, as it is in this show, it can get old.