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NANCY WHITE: New Work
At: Steven Zevitas Gallery,
450 Harrison Ave., through
Jan. 26. 617-778-5265,
www.stevenzevitas
gallery.com

A world of shapes, angles, mystery

By Cate McQuaid
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Nancy White is not a showy painter. Her abstract works at Steven Zevitas Gallery, no larger than 10½ inches tall, sport a

GALLERIES

consistent color value, which means there's little contrast of bright and dark — rather, this group of paintings is fervently dim.

That's part of what captivates. White doesn't romance the eye, but she draws the viewer into her small worlds of slicing shapes and tilting planes with compositions that suggest surprising space. Within the dusky tones, there may not be glamour, but there's mystery.

These works verge toward monochromatic, with “#35” shuffling oranges, and “#40” built from wine reds with the occasional sliver of green. White's color consistency evokes temperature, humidity, and the suggestion of stepping into a small, enclosed space with passages and obstructions that invite you to find your way by touch.



“#35” by Nancy White.

These are White's largest paintings to date, and she introduces curves amid all her straight edges. In “#44,” which is all gray-blues and browns, the left side looks like a brown bracket, cupping a scoop of blue twilight — the deep space in this painting. The layered planes of gray and brown to the right might be a pyramid, opening at the front to spill an unlikely shadow.

The flat, opaque forms in these works build on one another to suggest volume, they scissor around each other like slotted pieces of construction paper, or they angle out as if crisply

folded. The orange piece, “#35,” features that last trick, as triangles pivot one into the next, making a zigzag in which one angle nests into the next. These fractured, complex spaces confound, but, in their delicacy, they draw you in.

White's powerfully understated paintings are effective because her formal rigor prompts the experience of night vision — groping through shadows, looking for edges — which makes you feel as if you can't see at all. But of course you can. It's just a different way of seeing.