

**Galleries**

**Mounting vital exhibits despite the economy**

By Nancy Stapen  
SPECIAL TO THE GLOBE

With no good economic news in sight, a mood of extreme caution hangs over the art world. In Boston, where the art biz was never a sure thing, this mind-set is particularly evident. Perhaps most dramatic in the last year was the closing of the Arcus Gallery's flagship space on South Street, where grande-dame dealer Portia Arcus had acted as a pioneer in this emerging art neighborhood. Arcus is now operating in smaller quarters on Melrose Street, and the Boston scene is rife with rumors of further closings on South Street.

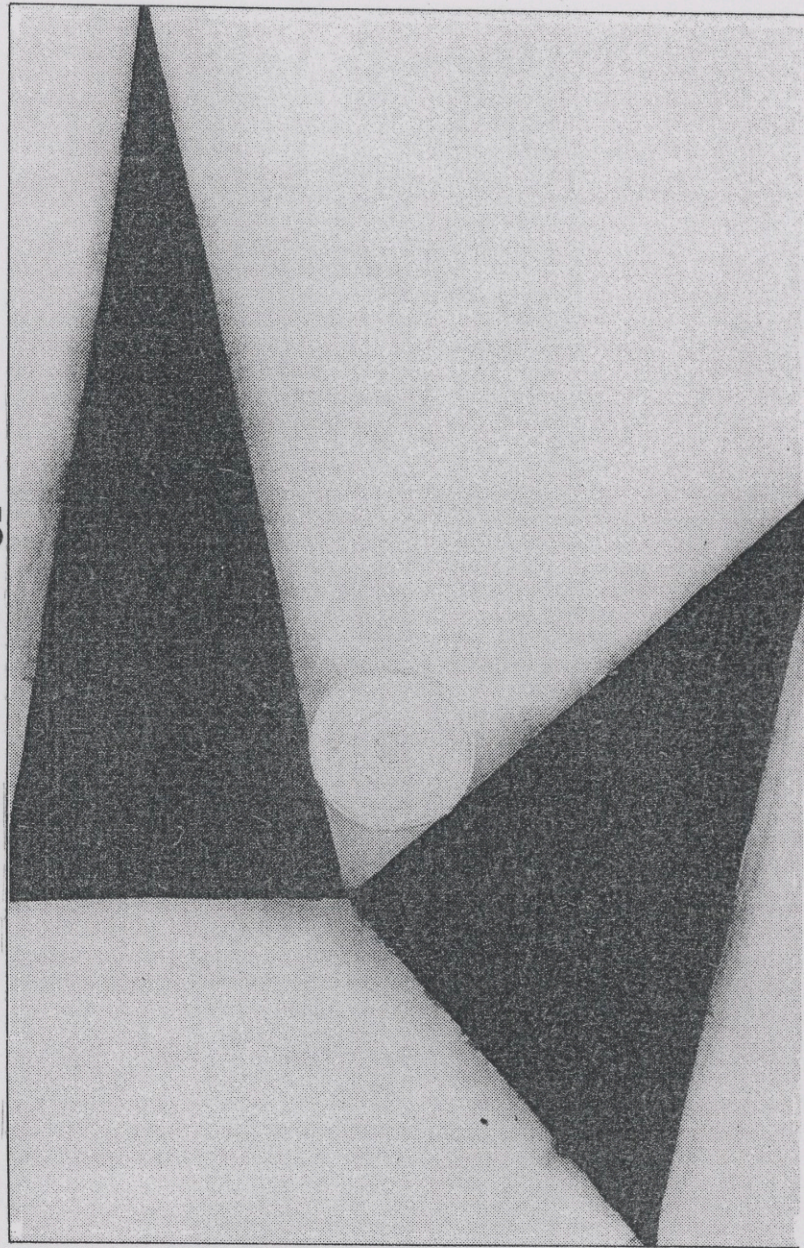
But galleries continue to mount fine, high-quality exhibitions. Here, a list of last season's outstanding shows, plus some discussion of the gains and losses on the current scene:

**Joan Snyder** (at the Nielsen Gallery). The latest series of paintings by this New York artist were bold, structural, painterly and laden with meaning. An heir to the Abstract Ex-

**Perhaps most dramatic in the last year was the closing of the Arcus Gallery's flagship space on South Street ...**

pressionist tradition, Snyder invests it with a profound, feminine, autobiographical cast. Her imagery gives form to the inchoate mass of feelings we call the unconscious, and though she employs the most visceral means to do this, the paintings — here inspired by the forests of Woodstock, N.Y. — speak to the presence of spirit within the material world.

**Nan Tull** (at the Akin Gallery). The authoritative drawings in this show represent an abstracting of the images of nature Tull has long explored. Instead of specific references to objects — pods, stalks and the like — Tull has shifted her focus to a visual equivalent for nature's processes of growth, rest and unfolding.



**"Wedge," by Nan Tull.**



**Morgan Bulkeley** (at the Howard Yezerksi Gallery). The carved and painted reliefs in this show conveyed an imaginative interweaving of Bulkeley's concern with nature, specifically the threatened warbler bird, and the detritus of contemporary culture. As eclectic as the subject matter were the feelings expressed: They ranged from the slyly humorous to the angelic to the vaguely sinister.

**Kitty Wales** (at the Chapel Gallery). This striking installation contained an assembly of feral animals composed of welded steel, such found metal as kitchen knives, and fibrous vegetation. This is not just more animal art; Wales makes us think about the relationship of modern industrial life to the scrappy beings in nature.

**Cameron Shaw** (at the Krakow Gallery). Shaw has emerged in the last few years as one of the city's most intriguing artists. The trademark high-relief boxes in this show's "Refuge" series were no exception; covered with fabric that emulates abstract painting and lined with early-20th-century comic strips, they alluded to the relationships between high art, popular culture and American history and myth.

**Ritsuko Taho** (at the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts). The installation "Geo-Luminescence," composed of a huge copper bowl containing a vast cache of some 500 giant plaster eggs in a bed of rock salt, provoked the viewer through contradictory allusions. It evoked light, fertility and preservation, yet it also implied an inert earth washed in bitterness and tears.

**Steven Trefonidis** (at the St. Botolph Club). This mini-retrospective of a seasoned Boston artist was characterized by beautiful drawing, an exquisite feel for color and an eye filled with empathy for the mysteries of daily existence.

**Aaron Fink** (at the Alpha Gallery). Fink's 10th one-person show at this gallery signaled an expansive development in his singular pursuit of ordinary objects transformed into monolithic imagery. Here the images grew beyond the paintings' edges, unleashing dynamic energy and paving the way for an ever more abstract exploration of the possibilities of paint.

**Ryan Loftus** (at the Bunting Institute, Radcliffe College). A real sleeper of an exhibition, with paintings small in scale yet devastating in effect. With their unstinting glare into the soul's dark night, these self-portraits, painted with Renaissance precision, were marvels of technical finesse and psychological revelation.

**Thaddeus Beal** (at the Akin Gallery). This first solo show of a lawyer-turned-artist presented a remarkably evolved, highly sophisticated body of work. Many-layered and much-sanded surfaces of rich hues and complex linear patterns represented visual schema for quantum physics and chaos theory. The suggestion was that things in the world are connected yet remain unknowable - an arresting blend of knowledge and enigma.