

Arts & Reviews

THURSDAY, MAY 10, 2007



COURTESY OF OH+T GALLERY (ABOVE) AND KIDDER SMITH GALLERY

Aaron Williams attempts to capture and comprehend the alienation of the two Columbine killers with "Forest Fire" (above).

Rendering the darkness

Artist draws on Columbine

By Cate McQuaid
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Aaron Williams didn't plan it this way, but his exhibition at OH+T Gallery could not have been better timed. His subject is school shootings. In the wake of the Virginia Tech massacre, his installation of paintings and sculptures is particularly poignant and stark.

The show is not entirely successful; Williams is just beginning to get his arms around difficult and touchy material. He focuses on the environment and words of Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris, the shooters at Columbine. He attempts to capture and comprehend their alienation.

The steely, vivid landscape paintings would be strong even

without their dark source material. Williams aims to depict the world around Littleton, Colo., as Klebold and Harris saw their hometown. He sets passages of dreamy watercolors against areas of flat, neon-tone spray paint or glossy black enamel. "Forest Fire" has spiny black trees carved out of a hazy red sky.

The jarring contrasts make for fascinating scenes, as in "Are We Dead?" in which the black enamel trees in the foreground jolt out of a watery blue forest, all beneath a harsh orange sky. A series of images of poisonous plants indigent to Littleton alternately seduces and slaps you in the face with its jagged dance among mediums.

The sculptures flesh out the installation handsomely, but they don't hold up on their own. Williams has taken fragments of text from Harris and Klebold's journals

Aaron Williams: Death Camas

At: OH+T Gallery, 450 Harrison Ave.,
through May 26. 617-423-1677,
ohtzallerv.com

and scrawled them backward on scrawny old logs, painted and set upright on beds of leaves and broken mirrors around the gallery. You have to lean in and read the text in the mirrors. It's all too sly and encoded, like a secret-message game for 8-year-olds, and the metaphor of the broken mirror is anything but subtle.

Williams is a young artist. He has courageously taken on a topic most people don't want to approach. To consider these young killers with patience and compassion, rather than hatred and blame, is a step toward preventing this kind of violence in the future. He's also clearly talented; time probably will refine his raw edges.