

# The Boston Globe

GALLERIES

## Distance Learning

By Cate McQuaid  
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Sean Micka, although quite an adept painter, is primarily a conceptual artist. His show "Memorabilia" at Judi Rotenberg Gallery examines the human compulsion to interpret and define. Our need to understand something -- say, a flower -- can sometimes deepen our personal experience of it, and sometimes detract from it.

Micka starts with source material in 1970s-era encyclopedias. He copies pages that interest him, laminates them, and offers them as handouts. He also takes images from those pages -- sometimes in color, sometimes in black and white -- and traces them, breaking them down into abstract compositions. Then he reconstitutes the images in paint on canvas, blown up and beautiful. The whole process reminds us of how far away we are from the original -- an orchid, say, or a mountain range -- and also how much meaning we invest in things to make them our own. That meaning may be informational, aesthetic, or, as for Micka, uncovered through the process of drawing and painting.

If it all makes you yearn for the original experience of an orchid, that's Micka's point. The paintings, done on blocky canvases that stick out from the wall, are sculptural objects; the artist takes information about a flower and makes it concrete again. That's hardly full circle, and he knows it. He's illustrating our plight: The more we interpret, the further away we get. Even so, a painting such as "The Grand Tetons (A Magnificent Mountain Wall Is Neighbor to Nature's Boiler Room)" glitters in its fine detail and coloring, and far outshines the tiny photo that appears in the encyclopedia.