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# The Boston Globe

## Witty Experiments

By Cate McQuaid  
November 3, 2010



*Chase*, 2010, 48 x 48 inches  
oil and pigments on canvas

### Surface tension

Abstract painters Wlodzimierz Ksiazek and **Rainer Gross**, in a show at Alpha Gallery, both manipulate the surfaces of their paintings. Ksiazek, using oil paint and cold wax, carves into his surface, making sculptural paintings. They are like the ghosts of architectural edifices, scarred and scored and brooding. Most are largely monochromatic with hints of other tones.

One piece (they are all untitled), though, is gashed with red, black, and white, and it pops off the wall. Black bars drop while thick spacklings of red cut across. Rectangular gouges

make diagonals beneath. For all the sculptural inclinations of the piece, the background is a lusciously vaporous mix of all the tones. Ksiazek excels at textural tensions. For my money, the more ethereal undertones he can add to his forcefully solid paintings, the better.

Gross presses a canvas covered with water-based pigment against a canvas covered with oil-based pigment. The two peel off one another, and he hangs them side by side, although not as mirror images — he will flip or turn one, to skew the viewer's experience.



*Apple*, 2010, 48 x 48 inches,  
oil and pigments on canvas

Fascinating, desiccated surfaces result. The oil on one canvas literally pulls the pigment off the other one. "*Balaba Twins*" is a stacked diptych. One is gray-green on red; the other is red on gray-green. The red looks stripped raw and fiery on the top canvas, but powdery and sweet on the bottom, where it cracks and crawls like lichen. The paintings have the same DNA, but they're distinctly different — fraternal twins, not identical. Hanging them together suggests a partnership, a give-and-take that can be beneficial, or damaging.