

# Curtis takes a turn toward abstraction

By ELISA TURNER  
Special to The Herald

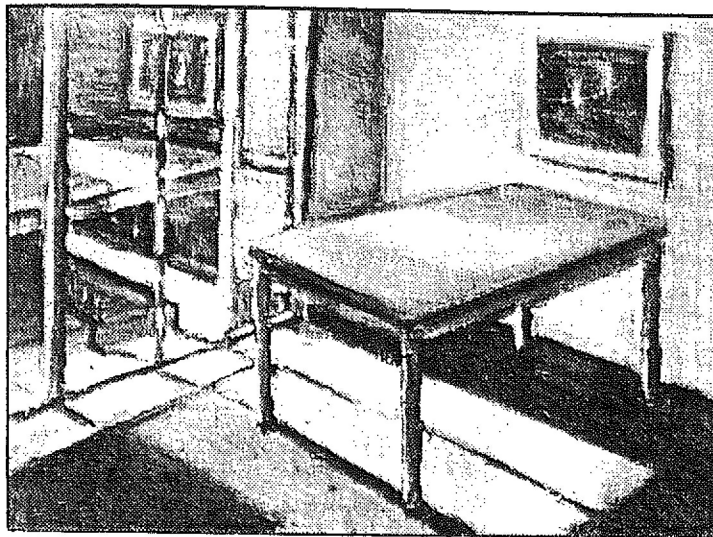
In his figurative paintings, Brian Curtis often shows men and women frozen in uncomfortable silence. They are lodged in bare interiors, often near open windows; the references to Edward Hopper are obvious. Curtis' brushless, immaculately rendered oil paintings also bear some relationship to work by realists who came to prominence in the 1970s when photo-realism's smooth, shallow surfaces received so much play.

In his exhibition of recent paintings and drawings at the Ann Jaffe Gallery (formerly Galerie 99), we see that Curtis, an assistant professor of art at the University of Miami, is still calling attention to the way painting can pretend to mimic photography.

This is not a particularly new idea, but Curtis brings his own twist to such realism by relying upon a palette of intense yet delicately modulated colors. Turquoise, indigo, acid green and violet are typical. These piercing colors have been precisely applied, managing both to support and undermine the artist's pretense at realism.

An exhibition that shows an artist working in a familiar style and then departing from it can be more interesting than one in which an artist repeats favorite themes. Such a departure is evident here, suggesting that Curtis' work has taken a provocative turn.

In a swing toward abstraction, Curtis seems to be giving freer reign to his interest in the formal qualities of interiors. Along one wall of the gallery is *Interior Deconstruction Suite*, a group of 12 small oil-stick drawings on paper. The title refers to the recent trend of attacking conventional notions about originality by raiding our visual heritage.



**WITTY STUDIES:** This is one of 12 oil-stick drawings from Brian Curtis' *Interior Deconstruction Suite*.

from art history to advertising. (As one museum director recently observed — only partly tongue-in-cheek — deconstruction makes plagiarism respectable.)

In these drawings, the artist manipulates interiors and views from windows to recall both Impressionism and geometric abstraction. The results are witty, jewel-toned studies.

Somewhat more substantial are the larger oil-stick drawings from the artist's *Interrogation Series*. In contrast to his paintings, these non-figurative drawings display a sense of gesture, however restrained. While the subject matter — tables, chairs, harsh lights — may evoke political interrogations, the real questioning seems to probe the slippery nature of so-called realism.

In one strong work, we see a desk in a room with a row of three windows. The windows, with their sashes of varying heights, suggest three

different "views" as well as three different abstract compositions. The drawing becomes even more intriguing as we realize, given the shape of the room, that the third window should actually be placed on an adjacent wall.

## AT THE GALLERIES

**What:** Recent Works by Brian Curtis and Peter Solow.

**Where:** Ann Jaffe Gallery (formerly Galerie 99), 1088 Kane Concourse, Bay Harbor Islands.

**When:** 10 a.m. through 5 p.m., through Oct. 3.

**Price Range:** \$750-\$15,500.

**Call:** 865-5823.