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What's up at Boston-area art galleries

Witty and awakened

Cherubini pairs with Beverly Semmes for a show at Samson, venturing out of her clay comfort zone to exhibit drawings. They're small, vaporous, bright-toned pieces in which the artist deploys a variety of techniques and textures, betraying the strong influence of artists such as Moyer.

They pull you in. Cherubini has wittily displayed "Wood Heat" flat in a square case, so as to eliminate the question of orientation — any side could be top or bottom, so the form seems to spin, unanchored. There's a rush of blue-rimmed red over a steamy breath of black and peach at the center, around which cooler blues puddle and streak. Some poured blots of blue pucker, and in one there's a field of roiling teal craters. All these little details make for a nuanced topography.

Semmes is known for her installation work using the dress form, but here she's painting over clips from such magazines as "Playboy" and "Hustler" and large-scale photographs. "Slippers" features a cutout from one of the magazines. It shows a woman seated in a come-hither pose, but Semmes has covered her with a lively blot of yellow fringed with little orange curls along one side. We see only the model's face peering through a hole in the paint, and her legs. Even her high-heeled slippers have fluffy painted add-ons.

These works are sometimes comic, but often violent. The artist paints with an energized, feathery stroke, but the painted-over women look almost expurgated, often with only arms or hands remaining visible. Semmes is appropriating and obscuring objects of desire so that we can't see them. It amplifies the sense that these women can't be seen for who they are — they are all just what we project onto them, which in this case is paint. It's a rude awakening, after frolicking in the playground of abstraction with Cherubini and her cohorts in "Simpatico."