Beckoning the eye, and the whole body

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You might have the urge to jump into the first painting in “Leidy Churchman: Lazy River” at the Boston University Art Gallery at the Stone Gallery. “Pool” lies on the floor just inside the entrance, a giant, shimmery abstraction in blues, greens, and blacks, nearly filling the gallery floor. It’s the clarion opening note in a gorgeously orchestrated exhibition.

Churchman uses color, language, a variety of styles, and video to remind us how painting corresponds to our bodies, and how it twines our bodies to our imaginations. Paint is like the messy stuff of an inner life, organized and expressed into something meaningful by the bodily action of painting.

“Pool” invites immersion. In one corner, a quarter moon gleams softly, suggesting a reflection. Depth and surface, viscerally evoked. The painting beckons the eye, and the whole body.

Paintings of graves appear throughout, in a faux-naive style of dinky, late-summer greens, flaring reds, and sooty grays. The artist places us at the foot of each grave, looking down. The rectangle of the grave becomes a screen for our projections, darker and more mortal than the watery delights we cast onto “Pool.”

Churchman digitally records details of paintings as he moves paint over them — a callback to action painting. His video “The Field” intersperses such images (including one where he pushes soil up the painting, chillingly bringing us right back to the grave’s edge) with scenes from nature. It’s a montage, like “Lazy River,” every image building on the next. A seascape fades into the fog. A robin sits in the grass, listening. Between these cuts, the monitor goes black.

Lovely and lulling, “The Field” is another screen, across which plays art history, surface and depth, color and gesture, personal associations. It’s an incubator for looking — which, as Churchman compellingly reminds us, is not a passive act, but a dynamically receptive one.

Three solo shows

John Cederquist's remarkable wooden chairs and trays at Gallery NAGA come at looking and making from a different angle. Cederquist, a wizard of technique, riddles with perception. Making pictures with marquetry — that is, wood inlays — he creates 3-D illusions on objects that are already three-dimensional. “Architectural Elements” is a functional chair, but it just as much resembles a scrap heap of architectural throwaways. Anyone might be afraid to sit on it.

Three two-by-fours zigzag improbably up the back and don’t appear to fasten together. One leg looks like a plaster cornice. An arm appears to have dropped onto the seat. A striped length of fabric drapes over the whole thing — only it’s not fabric. It’s wood inlay. The effect boggles eye and mind.

Cederquist plays fewer perceptual games in his trays; they’re simpler illustrations of his mastery. He dyes the wood he uses for the inlays for color effect. “Kegani & Green Tea” does prod at 3-D — he uses marquetry to suggest a rim, which is not actually there. The rest is pure picture: a crab on a plate, a small cup of tea — every detail rich.