THE GRADUATES

If you've got an eye for contemporary art and you want to catch a rising star, this is your chance. Master of fine arts candidates have thesis exhibitions up at local art schools this spring. These shows offer viewers a chance to see what fresh ideas are emerging and what new artists are worth keeping an eye on. We spoke with five promising graduates.

CATE McQUAID

NELSON DA COSTA • 37
PAINTER | School of the Museum of Fine Arts and Tufts University

Da Costa lays patterns in black over colored patterns to make images that jump. For all their brilliant tones and dancing rhythms, they also address the artist's childhood in war-torn Angola. By the time he was 14, both parents had been killed. After he was shot in an attack on his orphanage, doctors gave him art supplies as he rehabbed his wounded arm. One doctor, a Cuban, took him under his wing and sent him to study in Cuba. Homeless when he first came to Boston five years ago, Da Costa stayed at the Pine Street Inn, adjacent to the galleries at 450 Harrison Ave. He made friends with other artists and landed at the Museum School (and an apartment in South Boston). Da Costa has already found gallery representation, with Gallery NAGA on Newbury Street.

"You have to live with trauma," Da Costa says. "I'm taking these emotions and putting them into images based on a metaphor for war, for missing people, losing people, and cultural displacement.

"I have one picture of my dad in my wallet, but none of my mother... one of the paintings, in blue, the title is 'Mom.' It's a poetic notion of what 'mom' means. I miss my mom a lot.

"I'm not sure what's next. I'd like to work with kids and help found a nonprofit organization to use art to heal psychological wounds."

GEORGIE FRIEDMAN • 34
VIDEO INSTALLATION ARTIST | School of the Museum of Fine Arts and Tufts University

Step into the darkened gallery, and projections of water and sky surround you. Friedman's big, gorgeous visions of the sea and heavens, videotaped separately, don't quite fit together, with perspective shifts and images angling around moveable walls and a pillar. The artist taped many of them in Massachusetts; she captured the aurora borealis on a research trip to Alaska.

"It's been looking at sky and water, and thinking about how they move around us continually," Friedman says. "Some of us pay more attention to them, and some don't. But they don't care about us, either. Katrina wrecked all these people's lives.

"The aurora borealis was so amazing. They start off slow, just these green lines. Then one night they went crazy. I was so freaked out and excited, I couldn't use the footage — it's too jumpy. I had to go back the next night and keep the camera steady.

"The Atlantic is here, and the Pacific, local bays and harbors. Eighty percent is local skies, shot in the Southwest Corridor Park... The moons were shot here, the stars and auroras are from Alaska. It's like playing God — I think I'll put a little sky here."