

ART

Some things old, new, assembled and true

TODD Murphy's "Prima Vera," now on view at the Triton Museum, is monumental in size (11 by 16 feet) and hauntingly beautiful.

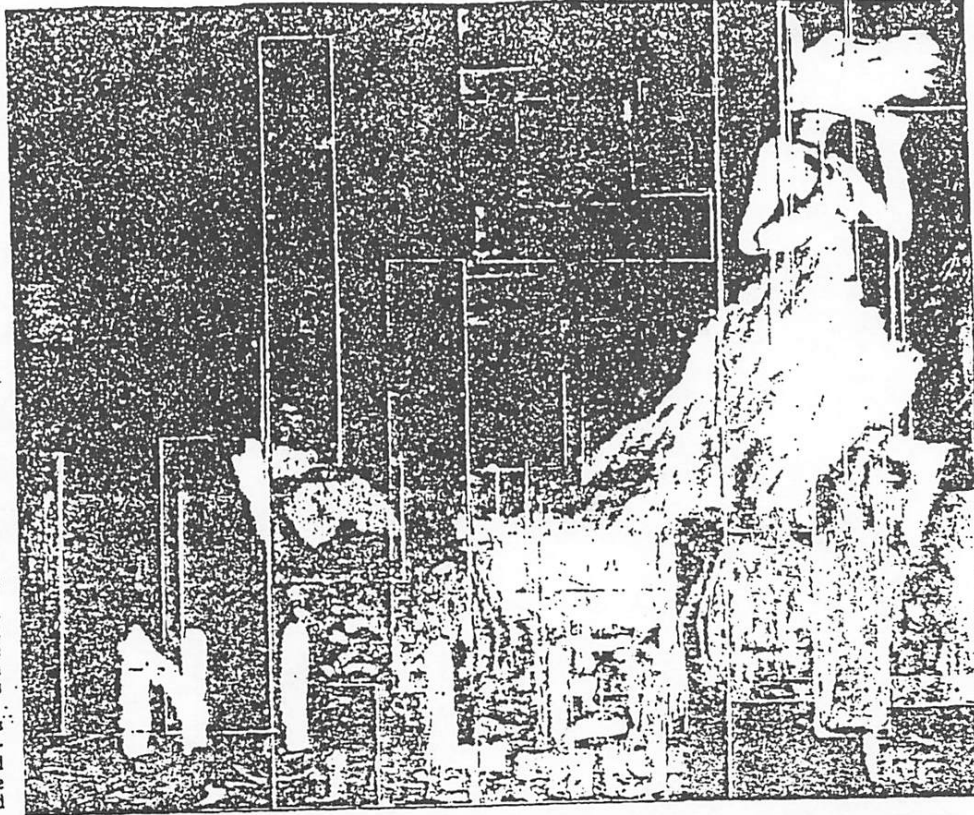
The right panel of this diptych displays the photo image of a woman whose pale and elegantly erect back, neck and head dissolve into a darkly opaque background (the canvas is coated with tar). This stands in stark contrast to the shimmering whiteness of the woman's Degas-like ballerina skirt. On the left, twin images of a similarly clad woman echo the figure to the right but become, on closer inspection, the headless torso of a dressmaker's form.

Layers of painted plexiglass bracketed over the canvas augment the images, while a hinged flap in the center seems to invite the viewer to reach inside and touch the bouquets of dead flowers hanging upside down between the two figures.

"Prima Vera" is one of three large-scale works by Murphy included in "Transitional Realities," a three-person exhibit that juxtaposes past and present, image and reality, in a series of varied personal narratives created through the use of assemblage and other mixed-media techniques. While some of the works ironically mock our visions of the past, others, like Murphy's, retain all the mystery and power of half-remembered dreams.

Alexis Smith, distrustful of the kind of romance embraced by Murphy, warns us to beware of nostalgia. Her collages use post-World War II images to present that era not as a period of stability and fulfillment, but as a time of empty icons and collective self-deception.

In "Desolation Angel," Smith places shiny red stars over the eyes of a smiling pin-up girl in a see-through negligee who is brushing her hair in front of a mirror. The stars are reiterated



Todd Murphy tells large, romantic stories ("Nile," left). Beverly Rayner takes a cooler approach in "Memento Mori," below, and "Woke up on a bed of nails, love, death, fear, sorrow."

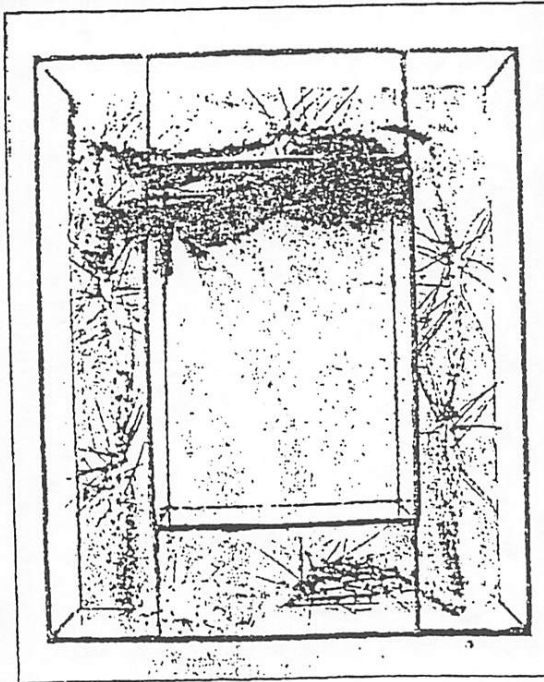


CATHERINE MACLAY  
Art Writer

on the wings of the tiny plastic World War II bombers that have been superimposed over the lamp bases in the calendar illustration. Smith furnishes additional irony with what sounds like a line from a B-movie of that era: "A girl like that scares me," it reads. "I'd give up everything and throw myself on her mercy, and if she didn't want me I'd simply throw myself off the edge of the world."

In "Boy's Life," Smith examines the myths sold to the children of the '50s with a page torn from a grammar-school workbook in which seeds turn, overnight, into rows of neat vines and with a Life magazine logo over an image of a couple kissing and the words, "Sometimes love happens like this. . . . All of a sudden and for keeps."

Smith's definitive comment on our dreams of a golden past is written on the seat of a battered chair: "All the simple, old-fashioned charm of a cop beating up a drunk."



Beverly Rayner completes this three-person show with an approach that falls somewhat closer to Smith than Murphy. At times she seems ready to succumb to visions of the past but then pulls back sharply. In "Apparition," a photograph

of a white horse grazing in a field has been transferred onto an old piece of chipped plate glass and back-lighted so that the horse glows magically, inviting us to share in this idyll.

But in "Murderers of Dreams," the invitation is abruptly with-



drawn: Black-and-white childhood snapshots in a faded album are covered with dead rosebuds that have been nailed over the photographs, blocking out recollections of lost innocence and hope.

In "Emotional Baggage," plastic windows have been cut into the sides of a tattered alligator clutch purse and filled with blurred black-and-white snapshots of a bride and groom. Here, Rayner seems to be inviting us to search through the wreckage of our personal pasts and choose between what is for keeps and what is not.

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Transitional Realities

Where: Triton Museum of Art, 1505 Warburton Ave., Santa Clara

When: 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Mondays-Fridays, 10 a.m.-9 p.m. Tuesdays, noon-5 p.m. Saturdays-Sundays

Through: April 18

Admission: Free

Call: (408) 247-3754