

VISUAL ARTS THIS WEEKEND

Bennett Street shares varied 'Visions' and 'Images'

By Jerry Cullum
Special to the Journal-Constitution

"Visions" and "visionaries" seem words to conjure with at the Bennett Street galleries these days. But, as Spanish mystic John of the Cross asked, what if visions are a measure of the defect of vision?

Atlanta artist Todd Murphy, who has become renowned for large canvas-and-plexiglass works in the style of Robert Rauschenberg, moves to imitations of Old Masters badly in need of restoration in the Lowe Gallery's "Visions of the 21st Century." That is, he works with a murky brown-and-black palette, as though his images were sludged over with ancient varnish.

His characteristically large, confident brushstrokes also are transmuted into meticulous renderings of immense, portentous-looking images of a dress on a dressmaker's dummy in one se-



Todd Murphy's "Untitled #5"
On view at Lowe Gallery

ries of paintings, and of an ape skull in another work.

These works are less obviously derivative than Mr. Murphy's earlier pieces, though they bear certain signs of '80s New York paintings in ways that echo that era and somewhat earlier American painters. For example, the paintings contain fragmentary

ART REVIEWS

"Visions of the 21st Century"

"Archetypal Images"

► "Visions": Through Feb. 16. Lowe Gallery. 10:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Tuesdays-Saturdays. 75 Bennett St. N.E., Suite A-2. 352-8114.

► "Images": Through Feb. 26. Ariel Gallery. 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesdays-Saturdays. 75 Bennett St. N.E. 352-5753.

words across the bottom in a way that recalls David Salle and Jim Dine.

The most complex piece is "Prima Vera." Placed in a pretentiously heavy gold frame as an ironic gesture, this dark canvas-and-plexi work includes a bunch of dried flowers hung as a bouquet between the canvas and the plexiglass. The dimly visible images include a woman wearing the dress that forms the leitmotif of the series, as well as the image of the dress on a dressmaker's dummy.

Mr. Murphy is an exception-

ally competent emerging artist, but his ability to work on a large scale has sometimes outpaced his conceptual powers. This series gives strong hope for the work of his full maturity.

David Nielsen at Ariel Gallery is a very different visionary, almost a survivor of the pattern-and-decoration school of art. But unlike that school, his acrylic-on-canvas "Archetypal Images," have a religious sense that recall Hindu or Kabbalistic diagrams.

Loosely rendered rather than rigorously linear, they seem less coherent than the mystical objects that they evoke. Mr. Nielsen's combination of interwoven bright colors is viscerally appealing. His reference to such things as the Palm Tree Garden of Kabbalistic mysticism (in "The Most Sacred, the Most Protected") is interesting. But it also illustrates the problems encountered in filling the gap between ancient traditions and current inner needs.