



Arts

ART REVIEW

BY AMY JINKNER-LLOYD

MURPHY'S LAW

Todd Murphy's paintings have become mellower in the two years since his last show at The Lowe Gallery, their bizarre subject matter

IN THE MONEY: Works by Todd Murphy are now on the must-collect market.

notwithstanding. Backgrounds show much less frantic brush work, and only a few pictures' surfaces are buried beneath multiple, choppy layers of Plexiglas.

The color photographs enlarged and transferred to canvas that Murphy employs for his central images aren't worked over with paint and gesso this time, so they're both more defined and softer looking. And because of this, their distinctiveness from the surrounding grounds becomes both physical and psychological.

That's what's new technically about Murphy's work. What's more significant is that Murphy has not simply sustained but deepened the quality of his work under the greatest pressure: Success. His monumental paintings are now priced up to \$45,000, thanks to a rising reputation and the fact that The Lowe Gallery opened a branch in Los Angeles last year. (No, the prices don't

go up because there are two galleries to operate. They go up because they must be identical in both locations, and they must be in line with the LA market. And they go up because — with a few enlightened exceptions — Atlanta's insecure collectors won't take the work seriously otherwise.)

The work is up to the challenge.

There are a staggering 66 items in this show, including airy charcoal and oilstick drawings on paper, mixed-media paintings of all sizes, and a handful of objects that are models for the pictures. There are four subjects: a chandelier, a goose, a boxer, and an androgynous figure that looks by turns mournful, powerful, sinister, or saintly.

All the subjects are frozen in the centers of the pictures, surrounded by paint so thick and black it looks like tar. None of the faces of the figures in the paintings are visible. If they aren't washed in shadows, they're shrouded in fabric, or obscured by fruits or fowl.

It is this palpable sense of foreboding, this mysterious, atmospheric sweep that makes Murphy's pictures as good as they are. The size of the largest works impresses by itself, but the troubling aura central to this body of work is in the smallest pictures too. That the quality is consistent throughout nearly six dozen artworks, and that Murphy has been able to produce so many things in only a year (since his West Coast show) is remarkable. ■

Todd Murphy at The Lowe Gallery, TULA, 75 Bennett Street, through Dec. 18. Tuesday-Friday, 10:30-5:30; Saturday, 12:5-3:57-8114.