

## REVIEWS

SANDY MALIGA

*Double Grind*, 2002, from "Abjectify," Video still.



and sewn-fabric "paintings" that look like unfinished paint-by-numbers pictures. Images such as the same head shown with various hair, beard, and mustache styles seem to have a logic or pattern that could be deciphered, but attempts at decoding lead to dead ends. The work is saved from collapse through its reference to the history of representing the gay male body. Carter presents images such as backdrops taken from nineteenth-century homoerotic photographs, men sucking on phallic straws, or a prone man urinating on himself. It seems as though the artist wants to recuperate for the body some sort of self-determination or freedom from socially predetermined meaning. But as in the rest of Carter's work and all the work in this show, any such self-sufficiency is undermined by the enormously complex and mutable nature of identity.

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### ABJECTIFY

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In just a short period of time, this space has established itself as a prime venue in the Twin Cities for sophisticated, concept-based art. True to form, "Abjectify" fixed the terms of its critical address in advance with a moniker that made reference to the psychoanalytic idea of the "abject." This concept, which was inevitable when discussing

the work on display here, has been important to the art of the last few decades. Associated with the Freudian unconscious and often used in connection with those aspects of (usually bodily) experience that have been disavowed by "normal" thought, the abject positions itself in opposition to the seemingly rational and objective. One famous example of an artist making use of the concept would be Mary Kelly's incorporation of her son's fecal matter into her *Post-Partum Document*, calling attention to an aspect of material experience normally unacceptable within the idealized concept of art.

In this particular show, the reference to the abject made for a lot of allusions to organic matter in all its oozing splendor. (The opening reception featured a carnival barker hawking bricks of meat.) One of Guy Nelson's sculptures, for instance, featured paint-encrusted balloons tethered to what appeared to be crushed squirrels, while Fr  derrick Mu  oz's large acrylic paintings were all smeared reds and blacks, evoking seas of blood and bile in which pasty, androgynous figures wallowed ghoulishly. Mu  oz's *The Gaze of the Gods* has gremlin heads made of ratty fibers pinned to its surface.

This theme of the invasion of reality by tormenting specters was continued in Liseli Polivka's installation of mutilated stuffed animals. Childish lamb dolls were strewn amidst standing panels that were decorated with graffiti, nails, and a seeming random assortment of pictures of similarly grotesque animals, the overall disjointed arrangement suggesting fragmented consciousness. Sandy Maliga's video *Double Grind* showed a miserable-looking

housewife doing chores, the repetition of scenes and disintegrative editing effects implying a Hades of madness and boredom. Meanwhile, Madeline McAlister's "Souvenir of Psychoanalysis" series of paintings involved canvas-like slabs of molded wax and salt, their ambiguously organic surfaces marked by scars, penetrated by immense sutures, or defaced by globs of gut-like material.

What makes any show centered around the abject interesting is that the concept, as defined by French theorist Julia Kristeva, refers not merely to refuse or viscera, but more broadly to that which, because disavowed, cannot be confronted without threat to one's sense of coherent identity. But rather than offering a wild embrace of the rejected, curator Suzy Greenberg's "new abjectivism," with its post-Dada insistence on the ugly and tactile, edged curiously on nostalgic. For example, Maliga's video installation echoed Martha Rosler's 1975 *Semiotics of the Kitchen*, while Nelson's stuffed bird affixed to a rickety wood structure seemed practically a copy of Robert Rauschenberg's *Odalisk*. Against all this self-aware retrospection, Chris Willcox's figurative can-vases depicting half-human figures suspended in dream-like spaces came across as refreshingly honest and direct. One might even say that, in their resolute classicism and attention to tradition, Willcox's paintings represented this show's own present, yet disavowed, unconscious.

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