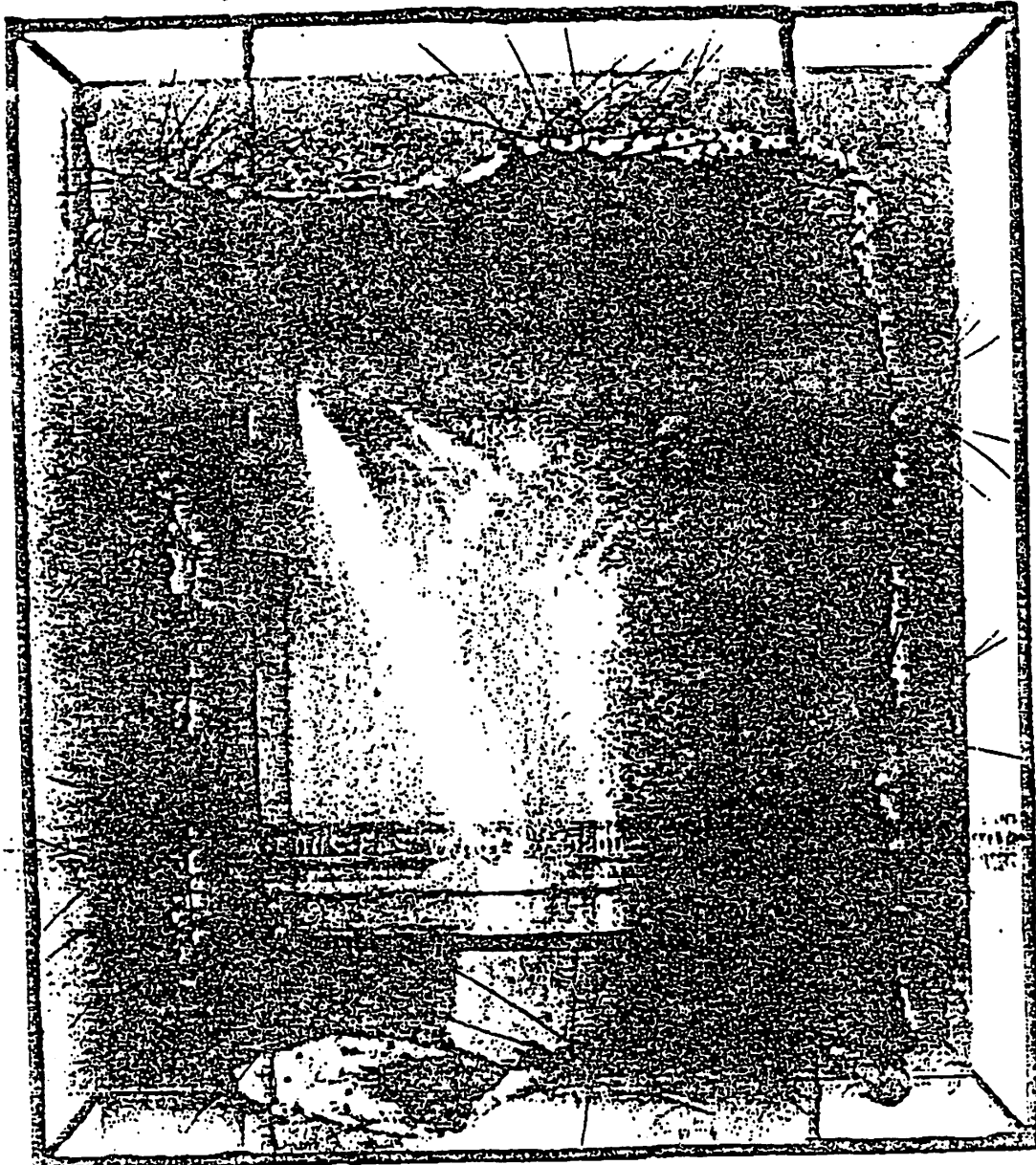


Memories, Dreams, Reflections

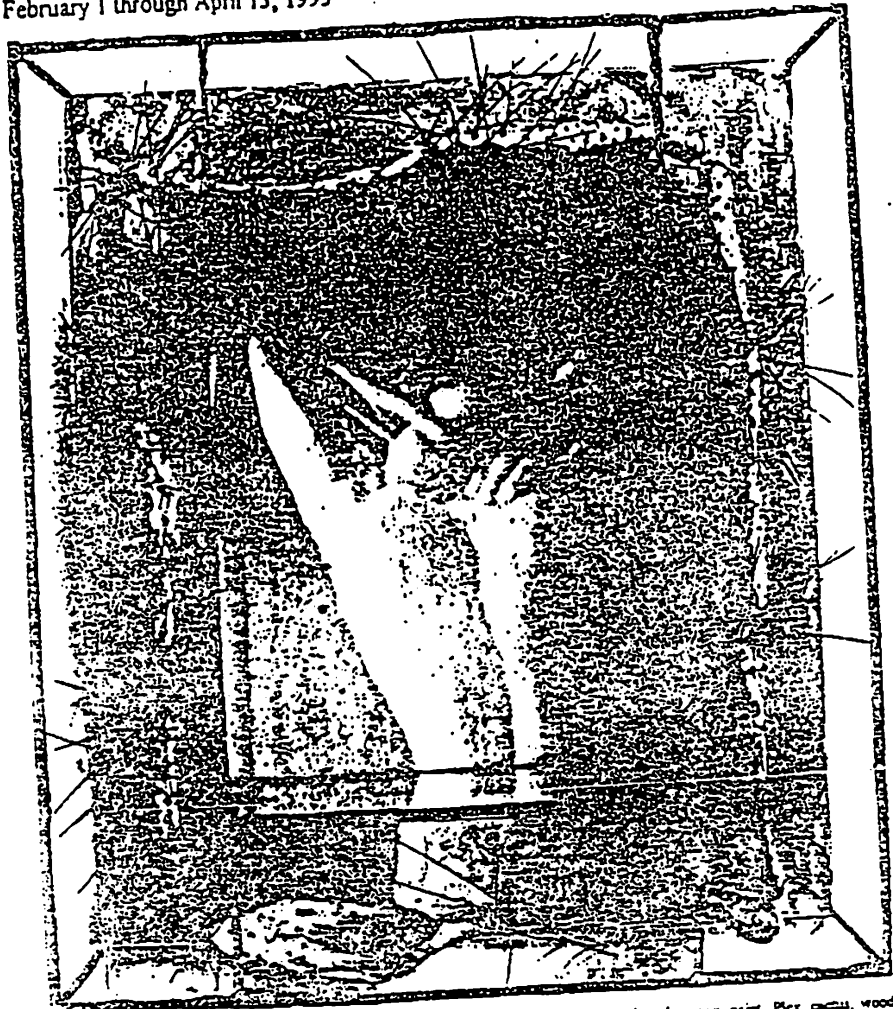
Three artists provide viewers with soul-searching
vessels in the Triton's **Transitional Realities**



Pointed Statement: Santa Cruz artist Beverly Rayner's *Woke up on a bed of nails: love, death, fear, sorrow sets up an imposing barrier between the viewer and the work's central focus.*

Rayner's images appear to be defined, yet the overall clarity is somewhat softened and veiled. The symbolic meanings are personal to each viewer and are left purposely as such. — George Rivera, *Transitional Realities* exhibition curator, Triton Museum, February 1 through April 13, 1993

THE MIRROR OF BEVERLY RAYNER



Beverly Rayner: *Woke up on a bed of nails: love, death, fear, sorrow*. ©1991. photo, glass, bamboo, paint, Plex, acrylic, wood, nihamo. 10" x 14" x 6"

love, death, fear, sorrow

frequently employ materials such as glass, Plexiglas, mirror, wax, paint or lenses to act as windows... Such devices metaphorically represent the illusions and distortions inherent in personal perception, the alternations of reality peculiar

to memory, lenses into dreams or thoughts that are never fully focused — or the layers of subjectivity one has to dig through to find the past, the truth, or identity

Beverly Rayner, Artist

by Ross Owens

Those who've grown accustomed to passively soaking up their ideas and information from a television or movie screen may find themselves unusually challenged by *Transitional Realities*, a new three-artist show which opened Monday at Santa Clara's Triton Museum of Art.

Transitional Realities is the second in a three-part series of exhibitions conceived by curator George Rivera. Featured in the show are Todd Murphy of Atlanta, Alexis Smith of Los Angeles and Beverly Rayner of Santa Cruz.

The old adage about beauty and the eyes of the beholder gets fresh reinforcement from the works of Murphy, whose huge paintings seem harsh, tortured and even grotesque, all in apparent contradiction to the artist's stated intention.

"I'm interested in making beautiful things," he told Vincent Coppola of *Atlanta Magazine*, "People are thirsty for beauty."

Although this viewer's thirst remains unquenched, Murphy's artwork is still nourishing in other ways. "Striking" and "haunting" might be better words to describe his mammoth mixed media creations which are beautiful only in the sense that a gargoyle is beautiful.

Photographs fail to illustrate the most prominent feature in many of Murphy's paintings—large sheets of plexiglas, often fastened down with bulky looking black brackets—that obscure and in some cases emphasize the artwork below them. The result is literally a multi-layered work of art that hints at hidden meanings.

Rivera concedes that one of his motivations during the careful process of selecting works for the current exhibition was to find artists who communicated their messages in a language that struck at the very

heart of human experience.

"I knew I was going to deal with people who dealt with the collective unconscious," Rivera explained, using a term coined by Swiss psychotherapist Carl Jung to describe a set of primordial images that we supposedly share, normally through our dreams.

In deed, most of Murphy's paintings could be seen as dreamscapes. All of his works are predominantly black, his figures indistinct and his subjects seem mythical as in "Nile" where the focus of the painting is a strange figure who wears long white gloves, and has the body of a human but the head of a horse.

Although the sheer size of Murphy's paintings makes them virtually impossible to ignore, the wry assemblages of Los Angeleno Alexis Smith are arguably the exhibition's most accessible works.

In general, all of Smith's pieces follow a similar pattern. She takes mass media images that are quaint or nostalgic and then subverts them with words or other contrapuntal artifacts. As a result, you acquire a new and often ironic view of something that in other circumstances might have been overlooked or taken for granted.

A worn, wooden chair, revealing faded layers of paint like geological epochs, sits on a black square platform and has these words printed on its seat: "All the Simple Old-Fashioned Charm of a Cop Beating Up A Drunk."

In "Dead Soldier" an ornate bronze frame holds a group of Spanish foreign language cards, numbered and with simple pictures that show everything from the moon to a songbird to a bottle of ketchup. On the card for death is a discarded piece of bubble gum, squashed over an image of a skeleton bearing a scythe.

The busiest and perhaps the most

mischievous of Smith's six works is the ominously titled "Desolation Angel," an assemblage that seems to question the idealized image of women as objects prevalent not so long ago. "Desolation Angel" uses a 1950s cheesecake calendar painting of a young woman in a see-through dressing gown brushing her hair in the mirror as its background but then subverts this postwar piece of memorabilia with a number of strategically placed souvenirs. Obscuring the lamps that sit on either side of the dressing table are a mothlike pair of plastic fighter bombers, attached to the surface of the work. A slip of paper covers the Dodge and De Soto insignia from the calendar's advertised auto repair shop and reads "Inspector B-24" while an actual string of pearls, complete with a tag that identifies it, hangs from the knot on the woman's gown. Superimposed on the assemblage are the desperate confessions of a lovesick man. Finally, pasted squarely in the middle of the woman's back is an oval fabric name tag embroidered with the name.

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Paned Expression: Todd Murphy's *Nile* masks its haunting mythical imagery with large sheets of plexiglas.

Realities

(from page 7)

"Ray," implying perhaps that the woman is just another of Ray's possessions.

At the end of the continuum of accessibility lies the works of Santa Cruz artist Beverly Rayner. Although all three of the artists to some degree discourage passivity, the power of Rayner's works, more than those of her colleagues, are wholly dependent on the viewer's active participation. Nothing jumps out at the casual observer. From a distance the pieces are almost meaningless. Step a little closer and they still seem abstruse. But if you stand there in front of one of her works and for some time their messages slowly reveal themselves to you.

An excellent example is Rayner's "Mysteries of the Universe (Part 1)" a striking frame-within-a-frame assemblage that begins with an old blue wooden box lid. In its center is a second frame, reinforced on its edges by dirty adhesive tape and covered with a pane of cracked glass tenuously held together by several

criss crosses of cellophane tape. Within that frame is yet another with a faded color picture of notched logs lying in a clearing, the tired branches of a tree drooping just above them and a foggy scene of greenery in the background. As you cross the border from one frame to the next you gradually relinquish control of your immediate surroundings and become part of the world that Rayner has created.

"Beverly," Rivera explained "is the poet."

Although Rayner's work is often lyrical and reflective, it can also be quite mournful and even bitter. One work that dramatizes the dark side of her memories is *Murders of dreams*, an open scrapbook sitting on a stand that bears the face of a lion. The pages of pictures are almost completely obscured by dozens of blood red flowers that have been fastened to the book by nails. Littering the floor down below the stand are petals.

While the artists change and the themes evolve, the constant is Rivera, who conceived the notion of systematically weaning museum goers off of reality through his three-part series. Rivera, who has been with the

museum for eight years, initiated the series in 1990 with an exhibition entitled *Figurative Realities: Beyond the Form*. That exhibition—he prefers to call it a "dialogue," underscoring the integral part the viewer plays in the whole artistic process—focused on a realistic depiction of the human figure, giving viewers something tangible that they could measure, compare and hold onto.

With *Transitional Realities*, he has loosened some more of the bonds of representational art as the works involved become steadily more abstract.

Of course, with abstraction comes risk. But rather than alienating regular visitors to the museum who are perhaps accustomed to more "traditional" art, Rivera hopes that the exhibition will communicate a sense of timelessness (similar to the feeling that you get when you've been driving down the freeway, he says) and challenge all who come to see it.

"I want people to stumble out of the museum in a daze," he explained.

Transitional Realities continues through April 18 at the Triton Museum of Art, 1505 Warburton Ave. in Santa Clara.
