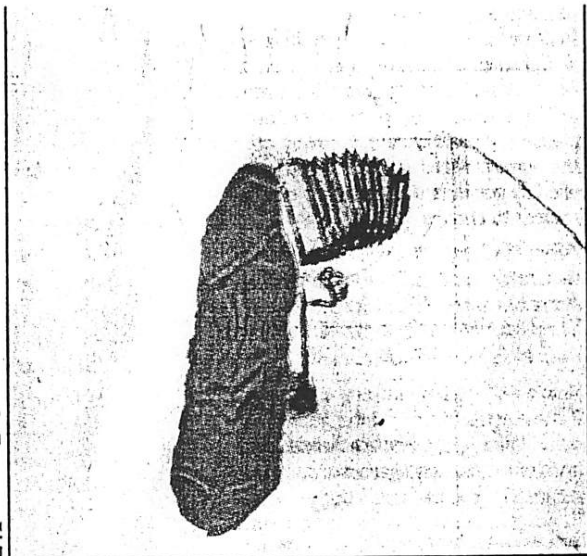




BURRELLE'S

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.xz000 10 .b...x**Melancholy:** An untitled Murphy piece from 1999.**TODD MURPHY****Atlanta gallery darling
flies above limitations**By Catherine Fox
cfox@ajc.com

Todd Murphy has earned a reputation for monumental, theatrical and enigmatic photo-based paintings. But, judging from this show at the High Museum of Art and his last Atlanta gallery show two years ago, Murphy's most compelling work is his more intimately scaled sculpture.

In the eight recent figural sculptures on view, all but one less than 3 feet tall, the Atlanta native reveals a talent for assemblage and an acute sensitivity to materials. He fashions figures using old busts, African sculpture and chunks of charred wood. He adorns them with feathers and film reels. He clothes these doll-size pieces in tattered muslin, encrusts them with salt, stands them on peeling bases. Black, white, taupe and occasional weathered red are his palette.

REVIEW**"Art at the Edge:
Todd Murphy"**

Through May 21. 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesdays-Thursdays and Saturdays; 10 a.m.-9 p.m. Fridays; noon-5 p.m. Sundays. Not for sale. High Museum of Art, 1280 Peachtree St. N.E. \$6; \$4 senior citizens and college students; \$2 ages 6-17; under 6 free. 404-733-4444.

The verdict: *Haunting.*

These worn materials evoke the theme that organizing curator Carrie Przybilla sees as central to Murphy's work: "the passage of time and the desire to remember." They also contribute to the pervasive melancholy mood, which is largely the result of the particular way Murphy, 37, conceives the figures.

All of them are thwarted in some way. Most are without arms or hands. In "Boy Looks East," the arms of the boy's robe are stapled to his chest, a straitjacket. Other sculptures have no head or are blindfolded. Murphy accentuates their crippled state by introducing contrasting images: bird feathers, a miniature falcon, a toy plane, even the flight of imagination of a film reel.

Murphy, who now lives in Charlottesville, Va., adds another layer of metaphor in the two pieces titled "Sally Hemings," after Thomas Jefferson's slave and probable lover. In the larger of the two, her head and arm are wrapped (bondage?) like a mummy. A falcon — which is also bound, by training, to its master — rests on her arm.

Similar imagery recurs in the drawings exhibited in an adjacent room. They are more exploratory and don't quite strike the same chord as the sculptures, but they are appealing aesthetically. Murphy creates the same timeworn ambience by using dogeared paper. He experiments with materials, drawing on piano roll and glassine, for example, collaging a velvet drape on a figure peering through an old-fashioned camera. There's a certain innocence to his line, which is deliberately awkward but adept nevertheless.

The sculpture in Murphy's last gallery show at Vakin Schwartz — a larger, denser and more encompassing look at his art — centered on themes of journey and rebirth. The ad hoc quality of the pieces evoked a rather optimistic mood — new entities created by unexpected juxtapositions. Here the process is the same, but, because of the character of the result, the joy of creation is gone. The life journey suggested by these sculptures is circumscribed by limitations.

Yet it is not impossible. Like the ballerina in Murphy's painting who dances on stilts with glass jars on her hands, we all face impediments, but we proceed just the same.