

Current Fictions: Work by Emerging Artists at MOPA

by CAROLINE KOEBEL

The scale of MOPA — the Museum of Photographic Arts — is perfectly suited for its current exhibition *Current Fictions: Work by Emerging Artists* — there is neither too much nor too little. *Fictions*, featuring eight artists born in the 1960s who take stock of the photographic medium through any range of inventive approaches and techniques, is amazingly disparate. Where one artist, Rick Hards, appropriates 19th-century tintypes for his own painterly constructions, another, Robert ParkeHarrison, figures himself as a frenzied inventor in a too-small black suit confronting an apocalyptic landscape (the father in *Chitty Chitty-Bang! Bang!* comes to mind) in large-scale photographs and mixed media on wood. While Liz Birkholz uses anonymous family photographs in her intricate sculptural works which consider the historical roles of women in society — both in the home and in the work place, Gavin Lee appropriates photographs from his own multi-generational family album, transfiguring them into three-dimensional objects about personal identity, history and memory.

If you're wondering who qualifies as an "emerging artist," curators Diana Gaston and Tomoko Maruyama say they have "chosen artists whose early work shows great promise, but who have not yet received wide recognition." The majority do not have an exhibition record longer than five years.

David Keating's *Edward: A Memoir* is notable in its cross-referencing of the artist's uncle, who succumbed to polio as a young man (well before the birth of the artist), with the artist's own "truth" of being HIV positive. In his narrative of twenty "borrowed" photographs — amateur snapshots taken by the uncle — and accompanying text (read left to right), Keating draws the viewer into a nostalgic tale of family tragedy, playing on the viewer's willingness to empathize with sentimental reflection (not unrelated to the impact of such TV shows as "ER" or "Chicago Hope").

It is about three-quarters of the way through the "linear" narrative, though, that an unexpected turn (plot reversal) is taken

— one that has a gripping effect on the viewer. Oddly, this happens just as the viewer is about to write the very theme into the script — yet not the exact lines. Keating's "lines" here shake off the sentimental tones of the earlier text in favor of something direct — and unmythologized.

Appropriately situated in the gallery's far corner is the semi-chamber housing Mary Beth Heffernan's *Fold* series. The twelve black-and-white framed prints, beautiful and grotesque, alluring and repugnant, depict animal parts and skins (all that holiday meat you've just cannibalized) that are re-sculpted — manipulated, contorted, and, of course, folded — until, as the artist writes, "the body is (mistaken for) its cloak." Her "subjects" are perceived at once as part and whole.

These reconfigured skins are not simply



Robert ParkeHarrison figures himself as a frenzied inventor in a too-small black suit confronting an apocalyptic landscape. Above, ParkeHarrison's *The Sower*, part of the new exhibit at MOPA.

a little disturbing, even in their arresting beauty. Heffernan is exploring what she describes as a "Baroque vernacular of beauty." What is amazing is just how varied the skin can be, and how the changing relationship between the surface and the interior of something can be read in multiple and contradictory ways.

These artists, along with Steven DePinto and Liza Ryan, are on display through Feb. 12, 1997. Liz Birkholz, Steven DePinto and David Keating discuss their work on Thursday, Jan. 30, 1997 at 7:00pm. The Museum of Photographic Arts in Balboa Park is open daily, 10am to 5pm. For more information call 239-5262.