

Creative Loafing .com

Atlanta

December 14, 2005

VISUAL ARTS / MICHAEL HOLSOMBACK

“Don’t Look Back”

By Felicia Feaster



“Halfway to China” by Michael Holsomback

The female body is the conventional muse of male artists, contemplating form, vanity, nature and the less high-falutin’ matter of sex appeal; the female mind, less so. Michael Holsomback is the exception to that rule, taking a pointed interest in psychologically-infused portraits of women.

His five paintings on view at [Chrysalis Gallery](#) feel like approximations of memory or thought composed of many ideas and images that pop up at the same time.

But Holsomback is after something more worn, regional and nostalgic. He breaks up his large canvases with smaller pieces of information, like patches applied to a quilt or postcards tacked to a wall.

In “The Edge of Paradise”, Holsomback’s patchwork of images include a small black-and-white “snapshot” of two men wearing white ties, a leather recliner set in a green field, a Dalmation, and a black woman wearing a troubled expression. Each piece of visual information piles up to create a deeper, more complex narrative. But unlike

flipping through a family album and guessing at the relationships and the events they commemorate, Holsomback’s image bank is stranger, more eclectic.

In “A Bird to Whistle and A Bird to Sing”, he juxtaposes a melancholy image drawn from old photographs of two frail girls in plain floral dresses next to sunny landscapes featuring ocean and endless blue sky. Painted next to those images are swatches of fabric or pattern in vivid colors. His busy tableaux suggest advertisements vying with family history for ownership of reality. A desired world of material comfort and beauty brushes up against a hard-knocks past.

Holsomback’s way of evoking past and present, abundance and deprivation, and how families can be composed of all those things is made all the more interesting because of how so many of his works prominently feature women. Holsomback’s girls and women are not simply beautiful objects for our visual delectation, but carriers of meaning and totems of difficulty, struggle and endurance. Though the work may promise more emotion than it can deliver, his unconventional subjects and his thoughtful, interesting approach leave you eager to know more.