

# Reviews

## 'Nostalgia' at Aftermodern

**N**ostalgia used to be hipper than it is now. Sometime during the dot-com boom a few years ago, there was a little surge in its popularity in the worlds of both music and art. Explaining the why of it is better left to sociologists—the 1950s come back on a fairly regular basis, anyway—but the fact remains that as a style, it's in a waning phase. It is difficult to deploy nostalgia as a contemporary artist without somehow diluting the relevance of your work. How do you make reference to the 1940s without having your art be all about the war, or the 1950s without drowning in malt shops and schmalztz?

The three West Coast artists in *Nostalgia* take very different approaches

to this problem. Andrew Phares appropriates physical remnants of the past and re-presents them with a twist. His raw materials will trigger vivid memories: a Visible Man, for instance—with an original vintage box!—whose clear plastic skin can be removed to reveal his (also removable) organs. Phares adds a dada touch to the toy, placing a gun, a typewriter key and a miniature booze bottle in the torso as if the Man had ingested them, or as if they were as integral to his physical makeup as his heart or liver. Several of Phares's other works involve adding bits of vintage hardware to old photographs, obscuring the people's faces and thus discouraging viewers from making an emotional connection. These pieces recall that famous episode of the

"Twilight Zone" in which the old woman receives a telephone call from her long-dead lover. We may wish for a line of communication between ourselves and the past via gadgets or photos or other human-made means, Phares seems to argue, but it is impossible: an illusion, or, maybe, a delusion.

Lisa Kokin also deals with actual detritus from the past, but she argues the opposite: Through old buttons, dolls and, most importantly, photographs we may indeed forge a vivid emotional connection with people who are long gone. She imagines her use of the pictures as somehow keeping alive those who have been forgotten; she mourns, knowing that if the photographs are available for sale to her, a stranger, it means that there are perhaps no more living memories of the people pictured. In her wall-mounted collages, dozens of old sepia-toned images are connected by yards and yards of string as if they were a constellation of stars—or as if

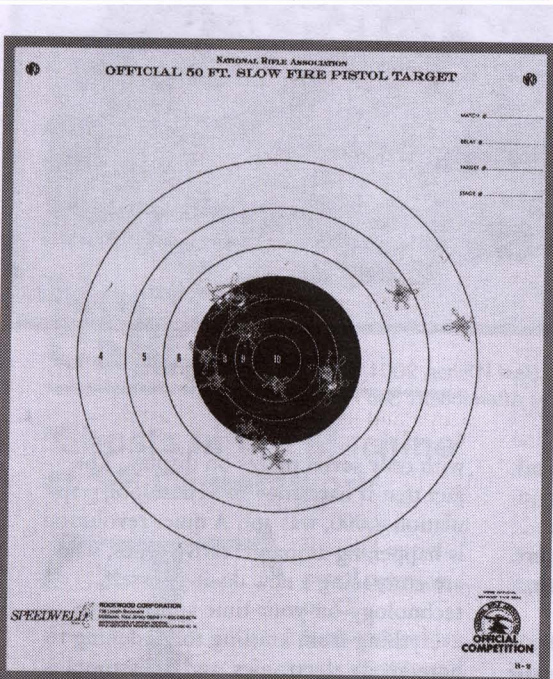
she were a crime scene investigator gone a bit mad with the squad-room bulletin board, desperate to make connections between anything and everything.

Lisa Solomon makes a brilliant contribution to the show with her "mended" rifle and pistol targets. Using decorative stitches and pretty colors of thread, she sews up the holes in shot-up vintage paper targets. She is not so much getting in touch with the past as fixing past mistakes—specifically moments of violence—ritually, symbolically, deliberately. She uses what is traditionally women's work to heal wounds that were inflicted by what is typically men's doing. There is less literal history in these pieces than in that of Phares and Kokin, and there is no old woman here, desperately trying to dial up her lost youth. Solomon is inviting us to ruminate on the past, but not so much with the intent to reclaim it as to make amends for it. The targets (and also to a lesser extent her other stitched works on paper) invite personal introspection, although it is certainly possible to read them as addressing much broader social and cultural wounds.

—Lindsey Westbrook

*Nostalgia* closed in October at Aftermodern, San Francisco. Also included in the exhibition was Lauren Gibbes.

Lindsey Westbrook is a contributing editor to *Artweek*.



Above: Lisa Solomon, *Mended Target*, pink; petal stitch, 2006, embroidery on rifle target, 12" x 10-1/2"; below: Andrew Phares, detail of *Riveting #1-20*, 2006, found objects on carte de visite photographs, at Aftermodern, San Francisco.