

CHRISTINA PRICE: PAINTED PHOTOS

Life-size creations evocative, vague

By Jerry Cullum
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Christina Price's brooding paintings over life-size enlargements of old tintype photos may easily be the most hauntingly poetic installation of the season. It is, in fact, pleasantly unexpected to encounter such meditative melancholy as a contrast to summer's fluffy entertainments.

Price's large, unframed pieces are tacked to the walls of Chassie Post Gallery in a sort of careful disarray. Each image is mostly black, except for the gray of the tintype portraits faintly visible beneath layers of paint. Each is lit dimly from below by a single industrial floor lamp, like an electric version of a votive candle. Outside light is kept out of the gallery by a thin black screen that veils the windows.

The arrangement of the paintings/photos recalls the installations of the French artist Christian Boltanski, who also uses found photographic portraits lit by individual bulbs like votive candles. But Boltanski seeks to evoke a specific historical event — most notably the Holocaust — using portraits of Central European Jewish schoolchildren.

Price doesn't seem to have any such agenda. The origins of the photos don't seem to matter, so long as the anonymous individuals are identifiably 19th century.

Boltanski has used anonymous photos to represent people of whom no photos existed — but he seems always to have a definite past in mind. For Price, as the title "Luminous Flux" implies, what counts is the evocation of loss and transience itself. The summoning up of a gen-



Christina Price's works — gray and black and lit by industrial floor lamps — focus on anonymous 19th-century figures.

eralized emotion rather than a specific memory is typical of our decade. Everything from clothing ads to rock videos gives us brooding glimpses of the past in general, but not clear images of

anything that actually happened — much less thoughts on why. We enjoy historical spectacle, in theme parks or Renaissance fairs, but not things that might make the past too intrusive or

REVIEW

**"Christine Price:
Luminous Flux"**

Chassie Post Gallery. 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesdays-Saturdays. Through July 5. 840 North Highland Ave. N.E. 892-1072.

THE VERDICT

Price's painted-over enlargements of vintage photographs have real emotional presence, but their lack of a deeper dimension is troublesome.

unsettling.

Since Price's work is so in tune with the mood of today's America, it seems almost churlish to emphasize this. The dislocation of our sense of history is acceptable in these serious works by a younger artist. In fact, it's even appealing — these pieces induce a rich sense of aching nostalgia. But the larger trend is disturbing.

Other Atlanta artists in their 20s and 30s have used similar strategies — and, eventually, moved beyond simple emotional jolts.

Sharon Shapiro's drawings of vintage photographs of children are as somber as Price's appropriated photographs, and almost as indefinite — but they hint at scraps of meaning. Todd Murphy layers paint on his own photographs, not historical ones, but he has often used antique objects to evoke unfocused emotions. Radcliffe Bailey's work began with generalized images of African-American history but now meditates on special meanings.

Price, too, may eventually use emotional drama to reach other goals. For now, the drama is almost enough.

Jerry Cullum, an associate editor of Art Papers, is a free-lance critic and poet.