

ENTERTAINMENT

New artworks are deserving of Northern Telecom awards

"New Works Fellowships: Northern Telecom," City Gallery of Contemporary Art, Raleigh, through Oct. 9.

As important as the art of sculptor Martin Johnson, photographer Lynn Marshall-Linnemeier and abstractionist David Szafranski are, Northern Telecom's gifts that made it all happen are just as important. Last year Northern Telecom agreed to the idea of funding three \$10,000 individual awards for new work by Southern artists and this exhibition is the result of those awards.

In a period of corporate down-sizing and zealots protecting hypocritical moral codes, a gift of such generosity is a mark of independence and a beacon of encouragement to individual artists, who may not fit the mold that some would like to shape.

According to City Gallery's Director Denise Dickens, who masterminded the New Works Fellowships and persuaded Northern Telecom to sponsor the pre-

mier gifts, it's time to ask them to renew their commitment. The show is excellent and should convince them that the high standards of these artists fit well with their corporate image.

The variety of media and styles reflects the eclecticism of the art of the 1990s. Johnson collects stuff from E-marts, flea markets and attics and reworks them into other objects that hang on the wall or stand in flimsy three-dimensional space. He's not the first artist to take American kitsch and reassemble it, but he makes us laugh even while he forces us to think about the junk we buy and then throw away.

Szafranski is a user of stuff, like ribbon-type material such as the webbing for lawn furniture or rolls of admission tickets or seat belt banding. Using only one type of material in an image, he weaves it together in large, flat unmodulated shapes. From a distance they look like minimalist paintings, but on close inspection you realize that such specific material from the real world underlies the minimalist philosophy that art has no relationship to life.

With such cameras as a 4-by-5 Tachikara field camera, a Minolta X-370 and a Yashica D, Marshall-Linnemeier uses her photographs as support for her



WINNING ART: Lynn Marshall-Linnemeier uses photos, like 'No. 5 Salvation,' to create images from the past.

paint. Take "No. 5 Salvation," for instance. Start with a posed model, paint on a ball gown and add a few chosen sentences from a classic. The result is a 20th century interpretation of Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel.

When we talked just before the grand opening last Friday night, Marshall-Linnemeier explained, "I had recently reread 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' and didn't remember that there was a whole chapter on Topsy. As I read, I was struck by Stowe's insights into the hearts and minds of the slaves and a series on Topsy began to evolve."

On the wall, she visualizes Topsy with

the doll Ophelia gives her. In another she holds pieces of the doll, which she has torn apart. The story is about Christianity, good and evil and displacement.

In her other series, "The Family Jewels," there are 12 images, enhanced with paint and text. Using family photos, she builds a narrative about a young girl who finds a family album.

I asked her how she responds to critics who say her work is too personal and autobiographical.

She answered, "You know, I think every family has its own family album and my version is pretty universal and you know what else, I've never let others dictate to me about my work."



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