

Good Times

Art Beat

The *Tableau* exhibition at the Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art (2020 S. Robertson) has guts. Not all 15 of the on-site installations are equally effective, but broad irreverence excuses occasional self-indulgence and silliness. And it's an entertaining show, curated by Phil Garner, who maintains that everyone makes tableaux, by deliberately decorating a Christmas tree or just by emptying one's pockets. Some of the tableaux are free-standing, like Mark Lere's marvelous semi-enclosed "Western Stage." The interior walls of the stage are a scumbly, painterly, aurora blue, scribbled with graffiti. Walk around the ramp in back and you can look down into the "theater." No performers or cue cards, however; the empty stage is the content. Michael McMillan's tableau is less optimistic, a dark, enclosed room, littered with the detritus of ghetto life, empty liquor bottles, decayed food and two T.V. sets, one showing what appears to be old Gidget movies. A naked hanging bulb flashes on and off so one's eyes can adjust just long enough to read the enigmatic scrawl, "Pray For Jamaica." Photographer David Sanderson's "Breakfast at Tiffany's" is a sterile, but oddly inviting,

all-aluminum bedroom. Above the sheet metal bed, like a crucifix, hangs a color photograph of two twin beds, Sanderson's own honeymoon room. Chris Burden is usually an artist of the outlandish and the original but his vapid group of suspended model airplanes was disappointing. And Micky McGowen's bride bound to the ground by lilliputian, wedding cake figures seemed contrived, too Northern Californian funky. But the flaws are few, the body of the work being at the very least tough to ignore. Thru March 8th.

More tableaux, of a sort, are on view at Ace (185 Windward) thru Feb. 29. Roland Reiss' *Morality Plays* are miniature interiors, in keeping with his earlier *Dancing Lessons* series. The frigid, dwarf environments are allegories, scattered with clues and allusions to the decadence of modern civilization. Black humor floods these rooms; tables, chairs, floors are all done with industrial, marblette finish of formica, decorated with plastic plants and flowers. Pillars embossed with different moral qualities tell the tales. In "The Moral Rights of Objects," a pillar of Avarice rests on the sofa, while Glamour stands in a corner. Cigarettes, wine, candy bars, junk food and money are spread about with apparent abandon. And "junk" books by Erica Jong, Beverly and Vidal Sassoon on "Beauty and Health," the women's section of the newspaper are clues to unseen inhabitants. There seem to be intentions of cleaning up, a spray bottle of 409 cleanser and a vacuum cleaner, but they remain unused. Like the stations of the cross, the *Morality Plays* can be read with a certain order. The ultimate evil seems to be a black room called "The Supreme Illusion." The ultimate goal, "The Possibility of Perfection," wherein the industrial ugliness, the formica gloss, is being repainted in lush pink. Desire rests on the coffee table while Avarice leans against the wall. While the humor is there, the thrust of the message is very bleak, indeed. Venality and decadence as the by-products of Money, not a novel observation but still a welcome reminder. The *Morality Plays* are uncomfortable to look at, but very difficult to forget.

—Hunter Drohowski