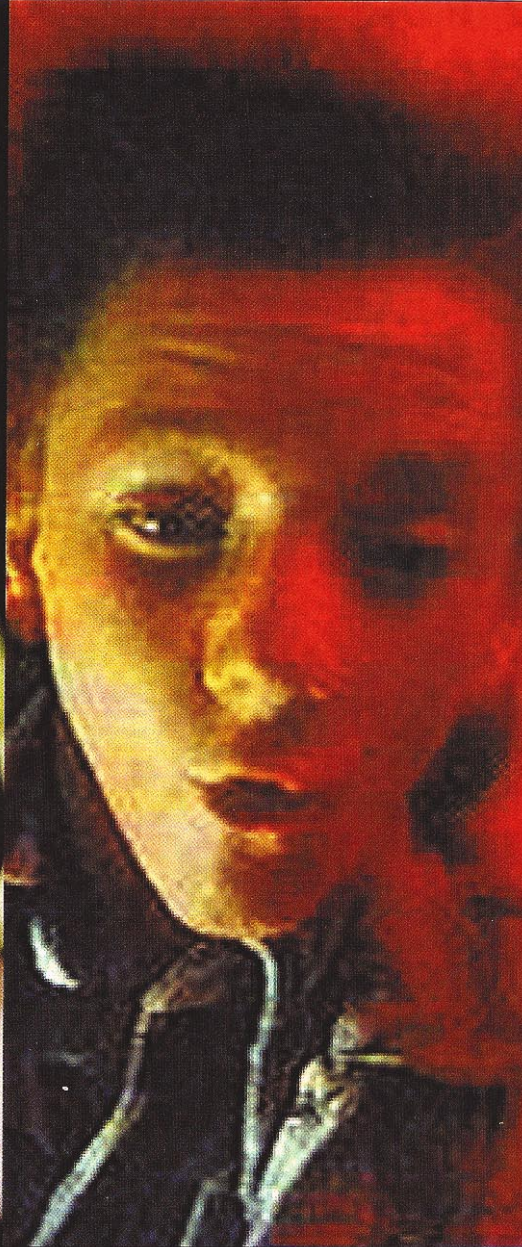




SHARY BOYLE

GAYLE GORMAN

SUZANNE PROULX

HALLWALLS

November 16 to December 21, 2002



There is no single methodology, material or subject matter common to the works of Shary Boyle, Gayle Gorman and Suzanne Proulx. In a venue such as Hallwalls, their work could have easily occupied the three adjoining exhibition spaces in an effective succession of solo exhibitions. Bringing their works together in one situation draws attention to the textures they share. It reiterates that these varied works often cross into and occupy similar emotional and psychological terrain.

Dysfunction. Fear. Anxiety. Desire. Apprehension. Uncertainty.

These are among the signposts that repeatedly recur in this visual landscape. Often, these sentiments arise from a benign or innocuous source, feeding a dark ambiguity between appearance and meaning. In Gayle Gorman's photo-collaged *Wall of Deprivation*—among the personal sex ads, images of children, found mugshots, and images of impact and destruction—are a select number of images that address this ambiguity, a selection of line drawings originally used to illustrate methods of first aid and emergency assistance. Her only gesture is to extract them from their original context and re-situate them into this mélange of collected imagery that, together,

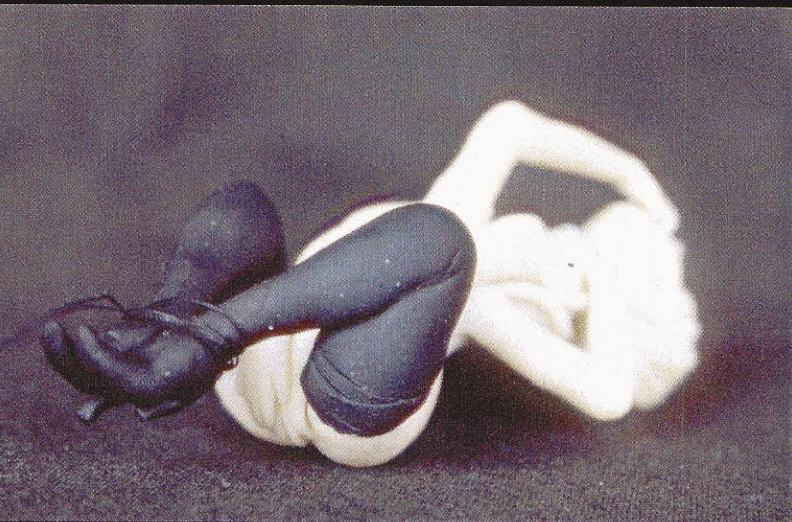
creates a hum of raw desperation.

What is equally interesting and unsettling is the emphatic manner in which this new context shifts the meaning of these benevolent images into something far more uncertain. The firm grasping of limbs, the position of the drawn bodies, the curious lines demarcating the direction of movement—even as we recognize the source of these images, we are acutely aware that there is an undeniable blur between helping and harming. We are no longer able to discern precisely what is going on.

The simplicity of this visual gesture—its concision and quickness—is a formal device that recurs often through much of the work of these artists. While Gorman's *Wall of Deprivation* contains

many dozens of images, it is not merely a visual assault; they are selected cautiously and woven for maximum impact. Also selected for maximum impact are the discarded dolls Gorman has been collecting and utilizing in her work. Occasionally employed in sculptural installations, she has also documented them in a series of b&w mugshots.

The mugshot format gives stark emphasis to Gorman's subjects; it is difficult to imagine them as any more desultory, degraded and tragic. In like manner, it is hard to imagine a more desultory, degraded and tragic congregation of youths than those who people Gorman's yearbook works. Again, there is a concise method employed, with Gorman blanking out every face with a smile upon it.



top: GORMAN, *Untitled*, video still, 2002

bottom: BOYLE, *Untitled*, synthetic modeling compound, gouache, thread, 3' long

GORMAN, *Wall of Deprivation* (detail)
dimensions variable, 2002

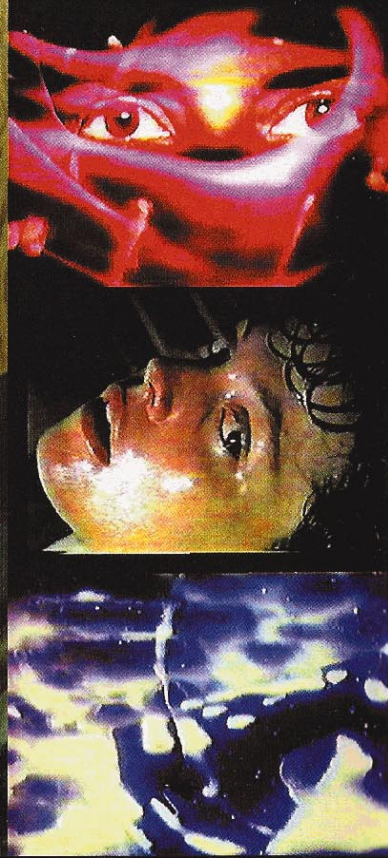
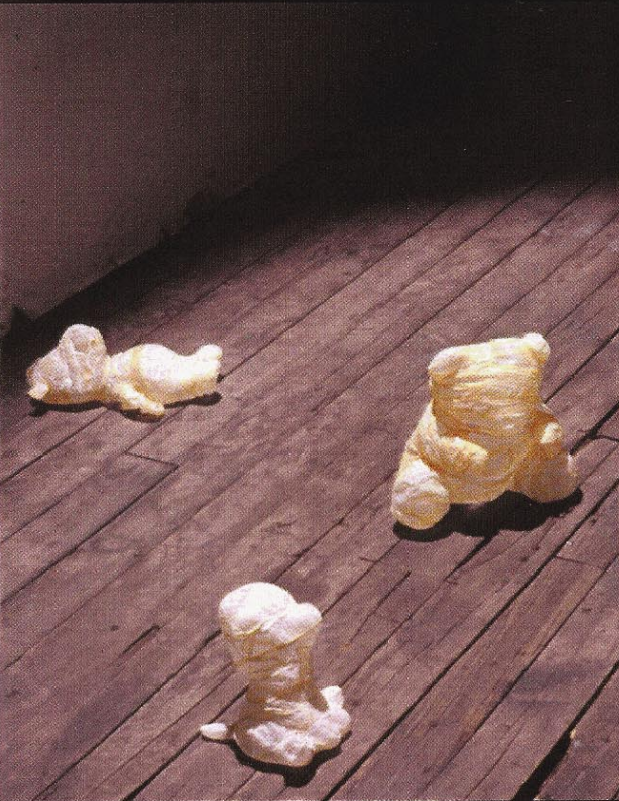
The result creates a direct commentary on the convoluted field of teenage emotions. Those faces that remain read as alternately contemptuous, anxious or apathetic.

Suzanne Proulx employs a similarly direct effect in the works from her *Toy* series. She does not disguise the method employed. It is easy to see that stuffed animals (discards that have been retrieved in similar manner to Gorman's dolls) have been re-stitched or fitted with false teeth. However, the directness of the formal maneuver is subsumed by its jarring effect. Proulx's stuffed bears, in particular, are simultaneously horrific and hilarious, an irresistible provocation toward uncomfortable laughter.

Proulx's works do not always straddle this duality. Some are merely unsettling. Her ambiguously-

formed *Siamese Cats*, encased in a amniotic-like membrane and lying upon a small bed with striped sheets, is decidedly lynchian, the nightmare image that lingers beyond waking. Though within its forbidding tone is a sadder quality that provokes a sense of empathy. Her stuffed animals fitted with prosthetic limbs produce a similar effect. They are unnerving and endearing. If they appear momentarily repulsive, it is not enough to expunge their inherent charm. They retain the demeanor of the outcast who still needs attention and love.

Proulx's works demonstrate a complex map of potential meanings. Their re-built selves would suggest a process of healing, but their problematic physical forms suggest healing run amok, or perhaps even a texture of abuse. At some point it is difficult to determine whether these toys have been treated by exploratory children, a taxidermist, a forensic pathologist, or a biogeneticist uncontrollably blurring species into new,



PROULX, *Lost Toys*
cast hog casings, dimensions variable, 2001

BOYLE, *Untitled* (detail)
11" x 14", oil on canvas, 2001

GORMAN, *Untitled*
video stills, 2002

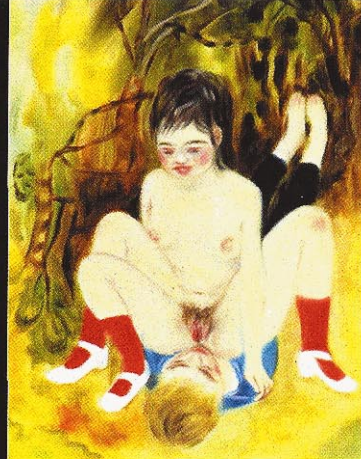
phantasmagoric hybrids.

Shary Boyle employs similar concision in her works. There is a consistent economy to the images Boyle utilizes, whether in drawing, painting or sculpture. Her sculptures are perhaps the most acute example. No larger than three inches, their combination of synthetic modeling compound, gouache, string and lace are shaped into forms whose diminutive scale intensifies their appeal. Their eloquent expressions of desire and anxiety are molded into succinct and personalized figurines, an iconoclasm of the heart that fits into the palm of your hand.

In her drawings and paintings, a similarly

direct methodology is employed. During the past several years, Boyle's combination of an illustrative drawing style and her subject matter (childhood and adolescence, identity, gender and sexuality) has often caused her to be contextualized within the "riot grrrl" subgenre. Not entirely inappropriate, it is also entirely inadequate to the breadth of the work. Boyle's work strikes a deeply humanist chord. While her small black and white painting of hands gripping a pair of legs from under the bed reads as a pair of child's legs, the emotional impact of the image extends beyond the irrational fears of childhood monsters under the bed. It functions as an image of pure, undiluted fear—familiar and readable to everyone regardless of gender, age or culture.

Boyle applies her formal brevity in a variety of ways, from line drawings to black and white paintings to fine drawings on lilac paper, with specific portions cut out to enhance and accentuate the image. Even in her most-labored paintings, their scale remains modest and the images singular and striking: a young girl in bed with immensely-overgrown fingernails; another girl in bed, reclining calmly with a misplaced head; a pair of dark-haired Siamese twins hanging happily from a moonlit tree; or a cross-country skier about to enter



the dark fold of an unknown forest, a beautifully-rendered image which collapses the quietude of a snowy landscape image with the trepidation of immanent peril.

The darker themes found in the works of these artists are often processed through filters of defiance, humor, erotic power and some



PROULX, *Siamese Cats*
reassembled chair, toy rattle, panty hose, acrylic
22" x 17", 2002



BOYLE, *Untitled*
gouache on matte board, 9.5" x 7", 2001



top: BOYLE, *Untitled*, oil on canvas, 12" x 16",
2001 bottom: PROULX, *Bear* (detail), welded steel,
plush toy, citrus skin, wax thread, 60" x 7" x 5"

thing not quite supernatural but more than ordinary. If there is pain in evidence (and there is), it is not a declaration of victimhood, but a strength and ownership of pain, a transformative vehicle toward more fearless purposes.

There are moments of wild, unexpected glee. Suzanne Proulx's toys manage to straddle their hybrid-ity with a sense of humor drenched within their anxieties. Her stuffed bear with red bow tie and nervous grin has a perversely Don Knottian aspect, funnily uncomfortable in his own skin. Shary Boyle's work swerves through dark avenues but does not allow the darkness to dictate: a dog blandly humps a cat

over the caption "It's not working;" a naked girl sits astride her beau and, in a twist of the sexual gag, it is she who has the third leg; and another girl sits atop her partner, pulling his sweater off against a brightly-hued background in the coyly-titled painting *I See Colour Bars When I Come*.

In Gayle Gorman's video collage—collating sequences from longer works—there are a multitude of images of chaos, action, sexual tension and potential violence and then, every so often, there appears a lush image, bereft of tension and vacant of anxiety. One that lingers in the mind depicts a young boy falling through a backdrop of gorgeous red, plummeting without fear. Plummeting with an

expression of breathless anticipation.

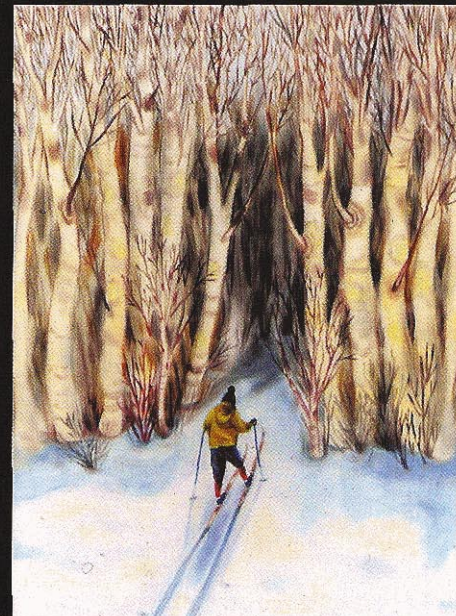
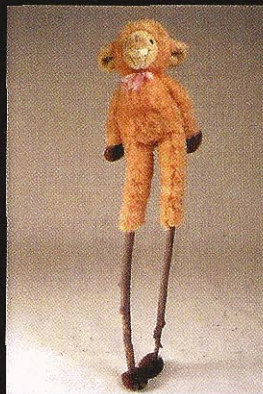
There are many morals to be found among these multifarious works and here's one: no matter the depth, darkness or texture of pain, if you look long enough you may still find beauty and possibility.

John Massier
Visual Arts Curator



GORMAN, *Untitled students #1* (detail)
b&w gelatin silver, 20" x 22", 1999

top: GORMAN, *Untitled*, video still, 2002
bottom: PROULX, *Toy series* (installation view)
plush toys, cast human teeth, dimensions variable, 2002



above left: PROULX, *Lamb*, plush toy, cast human teeth, wood, 55" x 8" x 6", 2002

above right: GORMAN, *Untitled*, b&w gelatin silver, 8" x 10", 2000,

right: BOYLE, *Avondale*, oil on panel, 12" x 16", 2001

front cover: BOYLE, *Spring* (detail), synthetic modeling compound, gouache, 2.5" tall, 2001;
GORMAN, *Untitled* (detail), video still, 2002; PROULX, *Lamb* (detail), plush toy, cast human teeth,
wood, 55" x 8" x 6", 2002

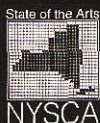
SHARY BOYLE is from Toronto, Ontario. Her practise consists of drawing and painting as well as miniature sculpture and performance. She has exhibited internationally, travelling and setting up temporary studios from Avondale to Amsterdam. In 2001 she performed a live Country & Western drawing/karaoke act called 'Honkintonkioke' in clubs throughout Germany. In September 2001, she was invited to perform three nights of live drawing that culminated in an installation and exhibition at the vonRot Gallery in Berlin. This past August she experimented with performative drawing in Los Angeles, presenting 'The Tale of Two Cats' at the Palace Theatre. In October, Shary performed 'Honkintonkioke' at the Uni-Go-Go festival in Chicago, and was Artist in Residence at Strutts Artist Run Centre in New Brunswick. Shary Boyle's work has been published in various magazines, comic anthologies and literary journals such as *Shift*, *Canadian Art*, *Saturday Night*, *Maow Maow*, *J&L's Publications #2* and *Starship*.

GAYLE GORMAN was born in Montreal, received her BA in Cinema from Binghamton University, her MA in Studio Art from the University of Minnesota-Duluth, and her MFA in Photography from the University at Buffalo. Her multimedia installation 'Heart' is currently on exhibit in the Window Space of CEPA Gallery, Buffalo, NY. Most recently her film loops and video collages have been screened throughout 2002 at Big Orbit's Soundlab space, Buffalo, NY, and she created a video ('Lament') for a Squeaky Wheel Media Artist Residency in 2001. 2001 also saw her work in an abandoned police precinct on Buffalo's West Side with artist Carin Whitney in a multimedia tour-de-force. She has exhibited her work at the Carnegie Art Center, in Champagne, Illinois, Duluth, Minnesota, and Miami, Florida. She lives and work in Buffalo, NY.

Born in 1968, SUZANNE PROULX earned her MFA from Syracuse University. She has had solo shows at ACME Art Company, New England College, and the Erie Art Museum. She lives in Erie, PA, where she teaches art and art history at Penn State, and is an Arts in Education Resident Artist through the Pennsylvania Arts Council.

Shary Boyle, Gayle, Gorman, Suzanne Proulx / November 16 to December 21, 2002

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HALLWALLS CONTEMPORARY ARTS CENTER

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