



Mike Terry, *Menu: Nine*, 1994, oil on canvas, at Southern Exposure, San Francisco.

making into sardonically self-conscious strategies. All use humor—parody, mimicry, irony, wit—as a tactic, with varying degrees of sophistication, despair and success. Offering seductive surfaces, the work simultaneously invites and repels both the viewer's scrutiny and a traditional "aesthetic" response.

Cindy Workman's coolly elegant mixed-media series, *True Love*, presents four large framed constructions that resemble slick, clinically antiseptic specimen display cases. Each bolts a grid of disks the size of 78 RPM records onto a pouffy background of padded white patent leather that bears a sickly likeness to virginal flesh, or Crisco.

Some platters are colored but blank; others are covered with enlarged fragments from fifties-era romance comics: a young woman suffers over her "obesity," another bewails a canceled wedding. You imagine the blank disks playing the favorite tunes of white suburban teenage girls of that day, like Frank Sinatra's "Love and Marriage." Workman's pallid crucifixions literally impale the sanitized culture of denial, fleshly mortification, and mass media propaganda meant to reinforce rigid gender roles. They also allude slyly to the exclusions of Pop and minimalism as equally effective systems for keeping women artists in their place.

Didi Dunphy offers a different female challenge, to fifties and sixties formalist abstraction. Her black and blue monochrome tie-dye canvases are smart, alluring spoofs of color-field painting. In her view of color-staining techniques through the hippie medium of tie-dyed fabric, she honors and questions the cultural status of both. Which is art and which is craft when both are commodities that define the social identities of their owners? The nuanced color and suggestions of organic forms within their abstract patterns make these paintings at least as engaging as anything by Helen Franken-

thaler or Morris Louis; their varnished seal adds another, transparent layer of irony.

In two other works, Dunphy wittily subverts so-called "systemic painting" (a subset of color-field and hard-edge painting characterized by systemic variations on a single geometric motif like a circle or chevron) with the traditional woman's craft of quilting. She fixes a patchwork of canvas rectangles and triangles onto a pleated canvas grid anchored to its stretcher with upholstery tacks, paints the surfaces (one black, one white), distresses them to look pockmarked and pitted, and finally adds her signature layer of varnish as if to restore some semblance of the pristine to the pretty mess she's made.

Mike Terry's chimerical paintings of tiered, lushly frosted, synthetic-looking cakes, rendered in confectionery pastel pinks and blues—empty calories in the mist—describe thwarted desire, delusion, the doomed orality of human wishes. Timothy Buckwalter's agile, energetic charcoal drawings based on fifties magazine cartoons look like clones of Richard Prince's only superficially; rather than wallow in bimbo-land, as Prince does, Buckwalter investigates cartoon representations of men as chumps, nebbishes and fall guys: versions of fallible masculinity which undermine the images of phallogocentric power and control promulgated elsewhere in the same journals. Bruce Hogeland's "Green Drawings" are onto something, too—in this case, reworking imagery and texts drawn from fifties-era noir films—but they're not quite there yet.

*Snickerdoodles* closed April 16 at Southern Exposure, San Francisco.

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# The Artists Who Knew Too Much

*Snickerdoodles* at Southern Exposure  
BY MARCIA TANNER

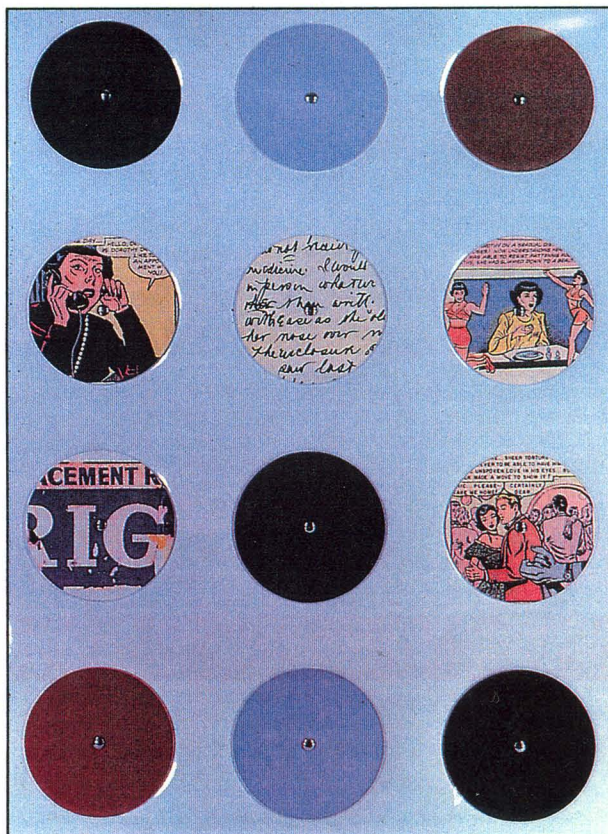
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snickerdoodle is a relatively tough, ginger-snappish cookie whose sugary topping belies its sharp bite. The "snicker" also implies a snide, if not downright cynical, attitude toward sweet treats. Still, a baker's gotta bake and the kids keep clamoring for goodies. The five artists who appear in *Snickerdoodles*—Timothy Buckwalter, Didi Dunphy, Bruce Hogeland, Mike Terry and Cindy Workman—each tackle the absurdist dilemma of the post-postmodernist artist. (The title of the exhibition also alludes to the references to 1950s art and imagery in much of the work.) What, after all, is left to do when all art is seen as appropriated pastiche, when advertising and consumer goods aspire to the condition of art and vice versa, when "originality," "beauty" and "the artist's hand" are discredited values—when even the artist's imagination is construed as a collage of shards salvaged from an exhausted, hypocritical culture, and nobody's buying art anyway? If everybody knows too much to risk a move, making art is both an impossibility and the only escape from the impasse.

These artists have turned ambivalence about the possibilities for contemporary art-

*You must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on.*

—Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable*



Cindy Workman, *True Love 4*, 1993, mixed media on vinyl, 65-1/2" x 48", at Southern Exposure, San Francisco.