



LACY PHOTO

Cary Leibowitz with two pieces from "Picture This: Fried Porkchops" at Real Art Ways.

Just When You Thought It Was Safe To Go Back In A Gallery...

Could the new Real Art Ways show provoke an encore of the Mapplethorpe controversy?

By Jayne Keedle

The hoopla accompanying the Wadsworth's recent Robert Mapplethorpe exhibit has subsided, but artist Cary Leibowitz' new installation "Picture This: Fried Porkchops" at Real Art Ways may well provoke some hubbub on its own.

Leibowitz' last show at the University of Massachusetts Hampden Gallery drew reactions ranging from admiration to outrage. His collages include photos clipped from 70s gay porn magazines, and the images were provocative enough to inspire someone to throw a brick through the gallery window in Amherst.

Despite the virulent responses, Leibowitz' work is not particularly graphic. "When you see it, you'll realize it's not that intimidating," says the 26-year-old artist. "The porno I use is just as simple as figure drawings." Since he doesn't do figurative nudes himself, he uses photographs that appeal to him. "I'm gay," says Leibowitz, "and I'm drawn to the imagery."



The Real Art Ways installation includes only a few of the works that caused the problem at UMass. Not because Leibowitz is worried about their impact—on the contrary, he says. The pictures have simply already been sold.

In fact, most of this up-and-coming artist's work is selling faster than popsicles in July. The Stux Gal-

lery in New York handles most of his work, and it's all Leibowitz can do to keep up with the demand. His work has been featured at the "Boston Now" Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston and at the I.D. Gallery in Dusseldorf, Germany. After his show opens at Real Art Ways Leibowitz is headed for Paris for a show of his work at Galerie Antoine Candau.

One reason for his commercial appeal could be the irreverence with which he treats familiar commercial symbols. For example: one work features an ad for Saks Fifth Avenue that uses the phrase "This Bud's For You," intended as an inducement to buy flowers. Leibowitz' twist is a naked man floating over the copy. A greetings card bearing the message "congratulations on your new condominium" is pasted over the face and torso of a nude male taken from a porn magazine. He also borrows the advertising techniques of bright colors and slogans to create wooden signs bearing slogans such as "I like spaghetti, but not 24 hours a day."

He borrows from other sources than advertising, however. His work shows the influence of pop art and dada, abstraction and expressionism. Although he says his art breaks little new ground technically, his approach is innovative and participatory. The Real Art Ways show, for example, includes rolls of plastic bags like those you find in the produce aisle of the supermarket. Each bag has a story written on it and the viewers are encouraged to rip off a bag and take it home. "I always like people to take souvenirs," Leibowitz says.

Leibowitz thinks this slap-happy approach may be the secret of his success. "My stuff is homemade and hokey," he says. "It's easy-going and even the art world likes to have a release once in a while."

The artist uses passport size photos of himself in many of the pieces, often in a humorous context. In one piece, his face replaces that of a woman standing next to a man in a bikini advertisement. Another ad shows a baby on a Persian rug, but the baby's face is covered by a particularly unflattering photo

of Leibowitz. The caption reads "may you age as beautifully as this rug will."

In this way, Leibowitz takes pot shots at modern society and its values. Growing up in Trumbull, he says, he found the emphasis placed on money hard to swallow. Now he uses his work as an outlet for his feelings. "It's breaking that tension for me," says Leibowitz, "making fun of those things that are valued and idealized."

Although his work is generally cheerful, it often has serious undertones. He tells stories of kids who see themselves as hated "losers." One sign proclaims: "There are two things I will have to watch for



the rest of my life: my weight and my racism." A safe sex piece reads "A dick in the hand is worth two in the butt." Now that may bring a few murmurs from the crowd.

But provoking his audience is not Leibowitz' intention. "I don't expect there to be any problems and I don't like to think that there will be," he says. "I don't like to be in the spot where I have to defend my work."

The show "Picture This: Fried Porkchops" runs concurrently with an installation piece by Hillary Leone entitled "Through a Glass Darkly" at the Real Art Ways Gallery, 56 Arbor St., Hartford. Exhibition closes March 30. Call 232-1006 for information.