

South End News

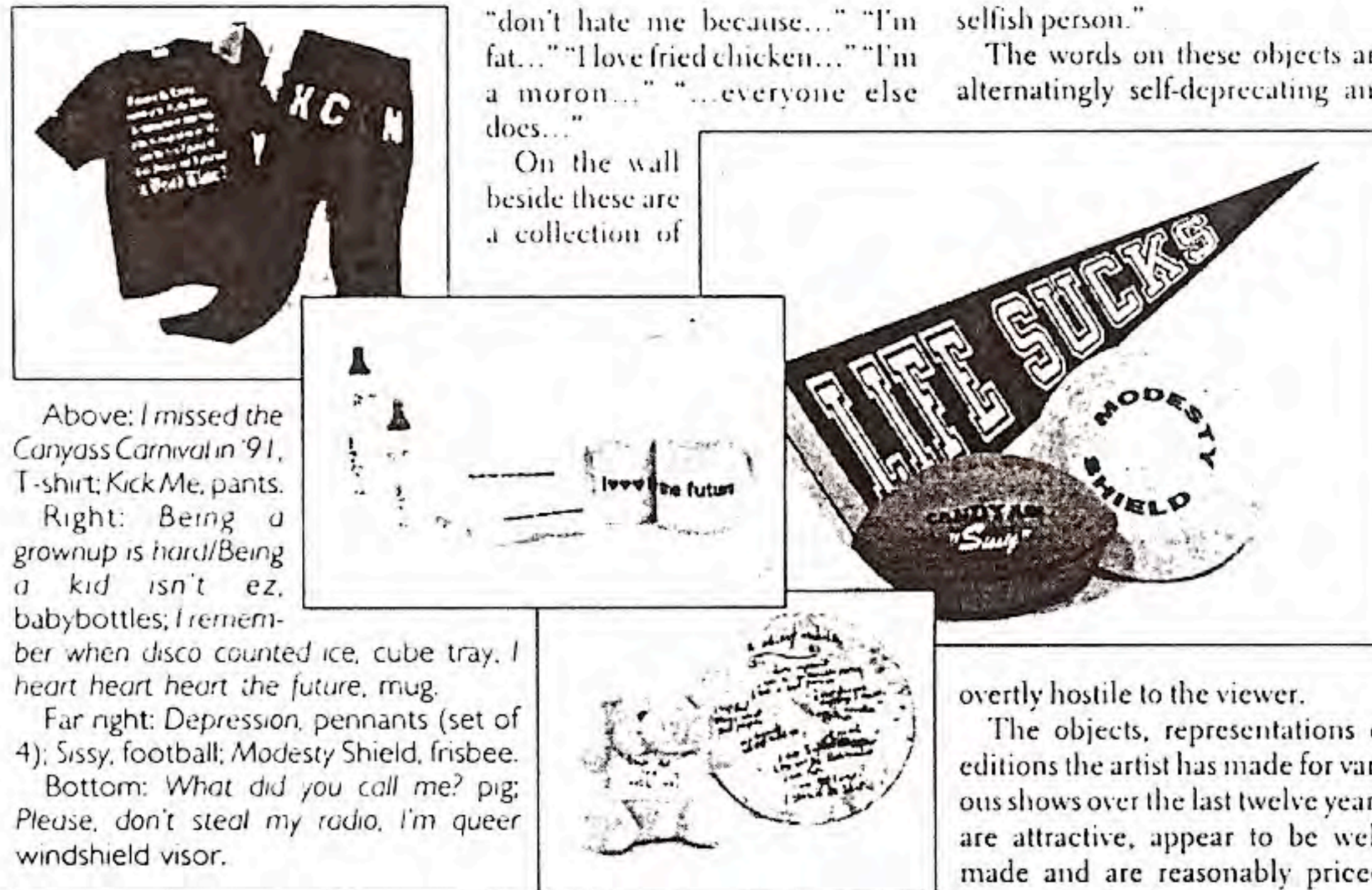
Ye olde art shoppe

Artist highlights role of galleries as promoters of consumerism

BY BRIGID WATSON
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Cary S. Leibowitz has, for his current exhibition, *Accumulated Crap for Collectors*, turned the front half of the Clifford•Smith Gallery into an ill-begotten gift shop for social malcontents. The gallery is a jumbled disarray of what appears to be mass-produced merchandise of the type that some well-meaning

Cary S. Leibowitz/
Candyass's
*Accumulated Crap
for Collectors*,
Clifford•Smith
Gallery, 450
Harrison Ave.
Through Feb. 24.



Above: I missed the Candyass Carnival in '91, T-shirt; Kick Me, pants. Right: Being a grownup is hard/Being a kid isn't ez, babybottles; I remember when disco counted ice, cube tray, I heart heart heart the future, mug. Far right: Depression, pennants (set of 4); Sissy, football; Modesty Shield, frisbee. Bottom: What did you call me? pig; Please, don't steal my radio, I'm queer windshield visor.

"don't hate me because..." "I'm fat..." "I love fried chicken..." "I'm a moron..." "...everyone else does..."

On the wall beside these are a collection of

selfish person." The words on these objects are alternately self-deprecating and

first sip of morning coffee out of my new "I heart heart heart the future" limited edition cup, wearing my "I missed the candyass carnival in '91" T-shirt...

I start to realize the effect that context has in giving meaning to an object. This is memorabilia for a culture in a state of moral crisis. This art, then, despite its humor and accessibility is expressing a genuine disgust for the society for which it has been made. Who wants a souvenir from that?

Furthermore, even if you did want a wry reminder of our incessant greed and obsession with material goods, if you buy the object you are ironically part of the problem.

What solution does the artist offer us? Quit buying art? While I understand expressions of revulsion for a society intent upon gorging itself to death on crap, it troubles me that the artist doesn't offer us any constructive solutions. Artists make stuff, and if they don't want to have other jobs to provide for their own livelihood, then artists sell the stuff that they make. Gallery owners sell artists' stuff for them, so the artists can devote more time to making art. People buy art for a lot of different reasons, but every time they buy something they are tacitly uphold-

overtly hostile to the viewer. The objects, representations of editions the artist has made for various shows over the last twelve years, are attractive, appear to be well-made and are reasonably priced. The gallery has become a store, and now I want to buy something. I am so entrenched in the rampant materialism of our culture that I begin scanning the price list for items cheap enough to be justified by the impulse-buy I'm about to make. Sure, twenty dollars is a lot for a coffee mug, but this is art, and where else can you buy art for twenty dollars?! I

relative treats you to upon his return from, say, Disney World, and in turn is displayed with the same care given to truck-stop souvenirs everywhere. Items are randomly placed on pedestals, hung on walls and spread across the floor. Racks of T-shirts, coffee mugs, sets of dinner plates, rain ponchos, Frisbees and

sort, too numerous in quantity and diversity to list here, are strewn haphazardly throughout the space. The gallery door wears a red and white "hours of operation" sign that has been altered to read "business hours: sad to bored." On the wall to the left of the door are mounted four brightly painted

political buttons that read "too young to hate Nixon." On the wall to the right is a blue and orange painting that declares the dual messages "modern art sucks" and "you're fat." Other items in this vast inventory include wall pendants declaring, "life sucks" and "drop dead," and a roll of wall paper

machine by whatever name you call it.

Leibowitz is merely calling attention to this system, and the nature of consumerism and our material culture. One job of the artist, after all, is to reflect the culture in which he lives, and these objects reflect our present circumstances. The point Leibowitz is making is that all galleries are stores of a sort, and every time you buy art in one, you are merely acting as a consumer. He seems to be saying: quit acting so holier than thou, all of you art lovers, you're just as guilty of materialism as everybody else, and you're still just buying shit.

Leibowitz hits us over the head with what he perceives to be the blatantly materialistic nature of the art world. Art as commodity—a cynical, effectively executed, though not original thought. This isn't exactly the first time we've seen an industrial object being called art (think Duchamp's urinal) or the first time someone has used mass produced objects and called them art (think Andy Warhol's factory), and Leibowitz knows this.

He makes numerous references to his predecessors in cynicism and to what he sees as his place in art history. Take, for example, the plastic shopping bag that reads, "things to do! read old Clement Greenberg essays/study-study! Cubism up to 1913""relationships to colorfield and

earthworks," followed by a recipe for "strawberry pretzel salad," or the teddy bear wearing a T-shirt that reads, "I will make a cubist painting someday but right now it is not important."

Throughout the 20th century there have been artists who have felt the need to point out the ludicrous nature of the consumer-driven art market. These artists see themselves, perhaps, as cultural watchdogs, in place to remind us of the inherent faults of the system.

We need these voices. Without them we become a nation of autotrons, mindlessly buying and

doing what we're told, rather than questioning the status quo and living lives dedicated to searching for greater meaning.

Accumulated Crap for Collectors exhibits Wednesdays through Saturdays from 11am to 5pm. For information, please call 695-0255 or visit www.cliffordsmithgallery.com.

Also on view at Clifford•Smith Gallery is Marco Breuer's *FAQs*, exhibiting through February 24.