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ART REVIEWS/Helen A. Harrison

The Traditional Meets the Modern and Melds

'Selected Works II'

*Stepping Stone, 356 New York Avenue, Huntington.
Through Friday. (631) 424-1650.*

Visitors must climb a steep flight of stairs to reach this new venue for contemporary photography, but the effort is rewarded by a fine survey of work by the gallery's four founding members. Two of them, Bob Mitchell and Melissa Gatto-Idler, are showing so-called straight photographs, while Rob Goldman and Bernice Halpern-Cutler created hybrid images that combine the camera with the computer.

In hybrid Iris prints, Ms. Halpern-Cutler imposes blunt reality on idealized interiors. Sumptuous color shots of designer homes are punctuated by jarring black and white intrusions, often with wry overtones, like a wallowing pig on a dining room wall. A work class muscle man bares his beef-cake in a boudoir mirror, a heart transplant decorates a kitchen, and a Cro-Magnon couple seems likely to stroll into a stately Adam-style salon. The tension between crudeness and refinement is maintained by an airless immobility, as if each room were holding its breath until the threat passed.

Conversely, Mr. Goldman's two "Faerie Dances" seem to be dissolving before one can fully perceive them. Printed in greenish ink on watercolor paper, his computerized images suggest the protoplasmic sprites beloved of Edwardian fantasists. Unashamedly romantic and nostalgic, they appear to be the products of a camera held by hands trembling with the thrill of clandestine observation.

In a series of untitled figure studies, Mrs. Gatto-Idler turns her camera on herself picturing her own body as a work in progress. Like a butterfly struggling to free itself of its chrysalis, her form emerges from enveloping darkness and twists into the light. Her surroundings are harsh and barren, but the inhospitable space is strangely animated by the figure's restrained energy.

Mr. Mitchell's images fall within the tradition of black-and-white documentary photography, in which sensitivity and perceptiveness elevate the mundane to a higher level.



The confluence of a staring man and a staring machine in Battery Park, a gust of wind that raises a little girl's hair like a cartoon version of fright, three solo actors performing an underwriting pas de trois on a Florida beach - each demonstrates Mr. Mitchell's sharp eye and gentle wit.

But his most affecting picture is of an AIDS patient. By focusing on the sick man's protectively raised hands, rather than by-passing the obstruction to zero in on a loved one's kiss, it displays an endearing reticence that implicitly points up the ambivalent role of the observer as voyeur.