



Sara Leith, *Untitled (torso, abdomen, needlefish)*, 1989, Cibachrome print, 18" x 12-5/8", at the San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art, San Jose.

# Inappropriate Appropriations

ther clever in concept nor integrated as image. That scribes have been replaced by data processors is not news, and the issue of visual acculturation is not addressed. As it is for Squier, photography is Taylor's vehicle of appropriation. But neither creates something that contends with the power or message of the original image.

By contrast, Barbara DeGenevieve chooses discriminately and manipulates her images so that each element becomes her own; these urbane pieces are nevertheless from the pulled-punch school of horror. With a dated feminism, as in *Portrait of the Artist and her Mother*, she reminds us that a phallus is anything that goes up or in. Her structure is elegantly Mondrianesque, but there is not enough of the humor that

possessed her to wire one edge of the triptych with a pubic fringe. In *Specter of Matricide*, a death-guilt rhapsody that is quite unterrifying with the lights on, and in *Original Sin*, a crucifixion fetish whose biomorphic assembly is a little ingenuous, DeGenevieve feigns torture with the mechanical competence of a short play too often rehearsed: one squirms cooperatively but does not writhe. It does seem a shame that the poignant message from her mother, whether real or fictional, must be summoned in validation.

Closest to the classic photographic image and method is Sara Leith, whose elegant Cibachromes have palpable presence and texture. They recognize the photographic image as real experience, as associative trigger and, in this

case, as creative invention. Incorporated insets are thematically and emotionally related, if sometimes compositionally disturbing. One of the best is an untitled piece (shadow on beach), which creates a multilayered illusion. The hovering viewer is the unseen shadow caster, at once real and suspended, a protagonist with a reluctant fascination with the things in the physical world. In her other, more worldly mode, Leith patches a quilt of time and feeling: individual images from the prosaic trials of heart surgery and childbirth—baby clothes laid out ceremoniously, the pajamas awaiting the patient's return—are emblems of absence, presence, apprehension and denouement.

Also frank, unpretentious and proportionately effective is the

## *Critically Situated: Photography Beyond the Bounds* at the San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art

BY CASEY FITZSIMONS

Photography is so culturally ubiquitous that it exists as a species of objects, like people, or as a phenomenon, like landscape. This is evident from the work in *Critically Situated*; once reviled as plagiarists (when they were found out), artists who appropriate or refer to photographs now regularly disdain the sacrament of photographic process and the dogma of its esthetic. Pristine surface and homogeneous resolution have

*Prophet* to the motion studies of Eadweard Muybridge is to find giraffes in the clouds—to poetize. Blowing up these famous photographs, Joseph Squier proves only that scale alone doesn't recast the image. His random air gun spatter is arbitrary—it surrounds rather than transforms the Muybridge image. The overlay of text is without clear relation to the pictorial content, posing just another coy enigma to perplex the viewer as the artist smirks from the key-