

Art in America

REVIEW OF EXHIBITIONS

Judith Schaechter at Claire Oliver

In her latest exhibition, titled "Extra Virgin," Philadelphia artist Judith Schaechter offered an unusual and provocative mix of the sacred and the profane. The sacred is represented through the medium of stained glass; panels were mounted on light-boxes hung on the wall, and the low-light gallery had a chapel-like atmosphere. The profane lives in the subject matter: female waifs undergoing a variety of torments or catharses.

Schaechter, who first studied glass with Ursula Huth at the Rhode Island School of Design in the early 1980s, uses layers of colored flash glass that have been sandblasted and/or engraved. Sections are often outlined in black enamel. Various framing devices—decorative elements or fan shapes—set off the central images, and repeating patterns often give the effect of looking through a kaleidoscope.

Schaechter's cultural references are wide ranging. In *Judith*

and *the Head of Holofernes* (all works 2002), she offers a send-up of a classic art-history subject. In her version, a Little Red Riding Hood type carries the decapitated head on a platter atop her head. The diminutive nude figure in the vertical *Big Bang* (50 by 20 inches) has a grenade where her heart should be. She wears a look of resignation as a bird flies above her, its body attached to a chain that is hooked to the grenade pin. A second chain around her feet serves as a kind of leash for a fetuslike creature that pulls from below. Is this a parable of the conflict between passion and responsibility?

More disturbing is *Child Bride*, a horizontal, 20-by-38-inch work showing a girl in a push-up position vomiting flowers. This is not a possessed Linda Blair in *The Exorcist*, but rather a girl in hair net and dress experiencing a kind of projectile deflowering.

The show also featured several graphite studies for the stained-glass pieces, including a meticulous drawing of the female figure in *Big Bang*. Three digital prints

recall the graphics of Japanese video games.

In a statement for the exhibition, Schaechter tells us, "My work is not intended to make comfortable people unhappy, although it may make unhappy people comfortable." Like her work, it's a mixed yet engaging message.

—Carl Little

Judith Schaechter: *Child Bride*, 2001, stained glass, 20 by 38 inches; at Claire Oliver.

