

Pagel, David. "Mini-Narratives." *Los Angeles Times*, 1 June 1995, p. F3.

Mini-Narratives: Alexis Smith's wonderfully old-fashioned collages and wall-mounted assemblages drift into your head like dumb country-Western songs on a borrowed car's AM radio. Once their casual rhythms hook you, it's impossible to stop replaying them in your inner ear, again and again and again.

Although the clichéd phrases and stereotypical pictures in her 22 new pieces at Margo Leavin Gallery initially seem too slight to

have lasting impact, they slip into your memory and work their invisible magic. Collectively titled "Cherished Notions," these deft combinations of pictures, words and souvenirs set in elaborate, handmade frames somehow manage to balance their slightness with a bittersweet twang that continues to resonate. Smith is a master of light-handed poignancy.

The magic is in the details. "Velvet Glow" juxtaposes a picture

Please see REVIEWS, F9

REVIEWS

Continued from F3

of a sleeping kitten, a pinup girl's smiling face and the label from a defunct household product. Each of the woman's eyebrows is adorned with a single cat whisker. Over the model's left eye, Smith has glued a trick 3-D eye that winks as you pass by. These little touches put a spin on clichés about women as

vixens and sex kittens, juicing up stereotypes with a shot of mystery and self-possession.

Other pieces combine humor and tragedy in selective, vignette-like views of the relations between the sexes. Tales of woe ("I Saw Her Leave the Luau With the Guy Who Parked the Car"), of housecleaning ("There's Something About Dirt That Makes Me Feel Clean") and of promiscuity ("It ain't easy being easy") emerge from Smith's art

like refrains that men and women keep reliving over and over again.

Wit and wisdom intermingle in these ambiguous, open-ended mini-narratives. In the right mood, anyone can star in Smith's loosely plotted dramas, where dreams, memories and myths merge with the ordinary stuff of everyday life.

■ *Margo Leavin Gallery, 812 N. Robertson Blvd., (310) 273-0603, through June 30. Closed Sundays, Mondays.*