

Pagel, David. "Anger drives political messages." *Los Angeles Times*, 28 November 2003, p. E32-33.



Margo Leavin Gallery

POINTED COMMENT: "Hell on Wheels, Redux," by Alexis Smith, who uses old travel ads and other clippings in her collages.

Smith abandons the one-of-a-kind frames she used to favor for understated ones carved from wood. That restraint is nowhere to be found inside the frames, however. The images are as blunt, ugly and unsubtle as anything she has made.

That's no accident. Anger seethes just beneath the surfaces of these collages and some juxtapositions cause it to boil over.

Many depict American, Iraqi and Afghan soldiers at war and rest. Others show politicians posing as friends or exaggerating their body language to convey unspoken messages. Two depict robed men and women going about their innocent business.

Smith clipped many of these images from newspapers and magazines during the last three years; others came from illustrated Bible scenes and old travel advertisements. One is from a U.S. Postal Service ad that tells customers how to spot suspicious items in the mail. Most of the warnings describe Smith's mix-and-match images to a T, or, for that matter, any art

Anger drives political messages

For the past 30 years or so, Alexis Smith has dipped her toes into the pool of politics. With her new show at Margo Leavin Gallery, titled "Living Dangerously," she dives into the deep end.

AROUND THE GALLERIES

powerful enough to move you.

Only a few other pieces include text, but with similarly explosive results. In one, the dictionary definition of "philistine" sketches the word's etymology while indicting all forms of close-minded intolerance. Patriotism and fundamentalism, especially when they're wrapped around one another, are likewise targeted by Smith's combative collages, which argue for laissez-faire cosmopolitanism. About half of her images are matted with fabrics from Africa, Mexico, England and the U.S., where gingham provides the only respite from a wide variety of camouflage patterns.

A touch of international sign language appears in "Glutton for Punishment," where the single prong of a broken fork stands in as a disdainful hand gesture. For Smith, politics and art are less like oil and water than fire and gasoline. Her works fan the flames of anger toward leaders for whom brutality seems to be business as usual.

Margo Leavin Gallery, 812 N. Robertson Blvd., (310) 273-0603, through Jan. 3. Closed Sundays and Mondays.