

STAYING VISIBLE

The Importance of Archives



Jan Rindfleisch

MILDRED HOWARD

Suzaan Boettger

Mildred Howard's mixed-media works combine traditional feminine interests of sewing and the family with one of the newest techniques of art – the manipulated photocopy. The quick reproductions of the copier allow Howard to use aged snapshots culled from relatives' albums as well as images of stereotypical black characters, such as Aunt Jemima, from her collection of outdated advertising. Assembled in collages with other "found" papers, documents and fabrics, Howard's imagery conveys sensitivity and, at times, pungent humor. These abstracted narrations do not get lost in sentimentality or political rhetoric, but instead evoke both familial and racial history that transcends individual experience.

Mildred Howard was born in San Francisco on August 26, 1945. Her family moved to Berkeley, where she grew up with nine brothers and sisters. She continues to live with her twin children a block and a half away from her childhood home. From early adolescence until she was twenty-six she studied classical ballet, modern and African dance, and now believes that only art exceeds the expressive capabilities she first discovered with dance. Her mother has been an antique collector for many years, and Howard's collecting instinct for items recycled into her collages was undoubtedly nurtured by the varied artifacts that passed through her mother's shop. Howard relates that her mother's skill as a "story teller" provided a model and inspiration for her own visual narratives.



Mildred Howard, 1979.

Photo: Kathy Sloane.