

Clarke's evocative collages

By Murray Paskin
Special to *The Examiner*

Rarely are there overtly political paintings at most San Francisco galleries.

So it was shocking to see "Side of the Vanquished," a solo exhibition of collages by Bruce Clarke that deal with political issues, Rwandan genocide and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict among them.

The show, at Bekris Gallery, consists of 32 pieces. Twenty-two are watercolors, 10 are acrylic paintings.

Two aspects make the show unique:

First is that the focus is not on issues or even what the conflicts are about, but rather on the severity of the violence, pain and suffering they cause. The pieces also steer clear of judgment or blame, giving them a power they otherwise might not have.

Secondly, Clarke's distinct technique reinforces the work's potency. All of the collages are made of fragments. Most contain a painted figure as the focus, surrounded by scraps of photos or torn news clips. There are bits of color throughout, and bold typeface identifying the piece.



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The organization seems arbitrary, almost as if the components were thrown helter-skelter onto the canvas.

Yet rather than distracting the viewer, the fragmentary nature intensifies the horror of the particular situation depicted, and also offers the sense of an explosion. The viewer is left feeling pain and suffering.

The sharp, white-painted canvas backgrounds also heighten the impact of the main figure and the fragments, lending the works a stark newsreel appearance.

In "Ignorance," a male figure with a face resembling a beaten boxer embraces a childlike figure. The word "ignorance" is highlighted in large typeface. Chunks of color and other fragments are interspersed.

The disarray and lack of discernible patterns create cacophony and

Feeling the pain: Bruce Clarke's painted collages tackle the emotional consequences of political issues. His solo exhibition "Side of the Vanquished" runs at the Bekris Gallery in San Francisco until Jan. 21.

IF YOU GO Side of the Vanquished

Where: Bekris Gallery,
49 Geary St., San Francisco

When: 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.
Tuesdays-Fridays, 11 a.m. to
5 p.m.; Saturdays; closes Jan. 21

Contact: (415) 513-5154
www.bekrisgallery.com

anxiety, almost as if an air raid is happening. The accompanying text, which attempts to explain the piece's context, is written on a torn piece of newspaper, ephemeral as the events taking place before us.

With his work, Clarke succeeds in awakening feelings blunted by the daily media's effort to explain or justify horrific situations.

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