

Mad, bad and dangerous

▶ BY OLIVER GIRLING

S *Smash Mega Hits Explosion* was dreamed up and realized by artist Robert Flack with the encouragement of dealer Carla Garnet. It's less a piece of thematic curating than a fun exercise, bringing together artists who Flack believes don't conform to what is considered "serious" by the art world.

Mad, bad and dangerous is the feeling the work here gives, and at the opening (at which the curator appeared as the devil), a massive throng boozed and schmoozed the show's title into reality.

First off, the works of Carlo Cesta, David Rasmus and Julie Voyce con- sidered "serious" by the art world.

Cesta uses materials made immortal on Portuguese and Italian porches and stairways in Toronto's west end — cast-iron railings, melamine and aluminum. *Voodoo #1* and #2, and *Monsterhome* are eccentric abstractions — they use iron railing painted silver as frames, buffed aluminum as picture surface and rubber matting as drawing material.

The rubber is in odd shapes, part- organic, part-machine, looking like

something Jean Arp, the French bio-morphic surrealist, might have done if he'd lived long enough. A smaller piece uses cut aluminum tape to make a grid that could be a close-up of a construction site. In some newer work, Cesta has scratched into the metal surface to make delicate shapes.

Rasmus works with portrait photography. He's got a set of wigs and a set of friends, and shuffles them accordingly to amusing, sometimes poignant effect.

A boyish girl turns girlish with the addition of a blond wig; otherwise she's cropped and manly, mugging at the camera. The boys are of the disorderly drag queen school, with lipstick smears and wigs perched precariously à la Larry, Curly and Moe. The man with the fluorescent green mop-top segues neatly into Voyce's multiples, called *Glamorous Dust Collectors*.

These are colorfully packaged, silk-screened "tiles" (actually paper)

that come in two designs: the severed hand with lightning bolts shooting from the fingers, and the woman's profile with a gigantic eyeball, lightning and a rose. Her print *My Babysitter*, hanging directly above, features a bald, bawling juvenile in a tutu, framed by irises. Voyce is also showing original pencil drawings from her self-published Xerox and silk-screen book, an edition of 250. My favorite is the half-foetus, half-old man holding an uprooted garlic stalk.

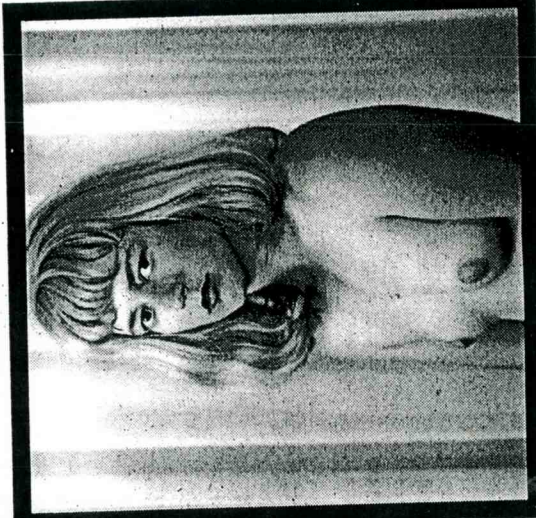
Rob Clarke takes the other approach: he shows just Xeroxes, no originals, of his conté drawings, reduced to fit into a multiple-part installation. His idea is to adapt ads, cartoons and mythological characters by giving them huge, awkward or playful phalluses. It's very boys-own but the overall effect is, less male-art than mail-art: the whole thing could fit into an envelope. Sometimes the drawings look like they might be arresting,

but you can't know for sure: they're too pale and tiny, and unless the viewer is irresistibly drawn to the content, the tendency is to move past them.

Ben Smit has two sculptures in the show: an engaging wagon made from copper plumbing pipes, tin cans and power-saw blades for wheels; and a beautiful medicine cabinet, a box made of pine and cedar with a geometric cross cut in the door.

Nancy Davenport's *Improbable Heroines of Masturbation* imagines two (secular) saints, Catherine of Genoa and Christine the Astonishing, in mock-historic biographies of women who became famous through their devotion to masturbatory bliss. The satire is astute, and the photographs in the piece — gloved arms with a snail, butterfly, lily and two fish — lend a subtle gloss to the breathy prose.

These artists appear because they got the call from Flack and a house to show in from Garnet Press. But what brings this show together in the end isn't any similarity between them so much as their influence on and relation to Flack's own complicated, interesting work.



"Sandra" by David Rasmus, 1992

REVIEW SMASH MEGA HITS EXPLOSION

Works by Carlo Cesta, Rob Clarke, Nancy Davenport, David Rasmus, Ben Smit and Julie Voyce.

Garnet Press Gallery, 580 Richmond St. W., 366-5012. Until Aug. 14.