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Shopping is our national religion. Our malls are grander than our cathedrals, and retail design turns the act of shopping into a grand ritual with the shopper as star. **BRIAN ULRICH** in his ten color photographs at Peter Miller articulates this with a frightening precision.

Ulrich's images show how stores feed shoppers' narcissism, placing them at the center of a constructed universe. In one of two images titled *Smithhaven, NY, 2003*, a teenager sits talking on her cell phone on a high-backed plastic bench like a cross between a diner booth and a throne. Draped in a sheer curtain, this showy settee places the girl center stage, surrounded by merchandise. At the Disney Store in *Cleveland, OH, 2003* shelves overflowing with stuffed animals frame a large picture of the Magic Kingdom while a little girl stands just off center looking toward the camera almost lost amid the toys.

Brian Ulrich

Peter Miller
118 N. Peoria
through October 16
312-951-1700

Art at War—The Artist's Voice

Aldo Castillo
233 W. Huron
through October 16
312-337-2536

Stores and malls are all about looking. In *Chicago, IL, 2003* shoppers on escalators take in the changing perspectives. After all this looking, the moment of purchase can be intensely serious. In *Edinburgh, UK, 2003*, a young goth girl sits contemplating a shoe with colored beads that match the rainbow stripes on her purse's shoulder strap.

Ulrich, a Chicagoan who received an MFA this year from Columbia College, formerly concentrated on photographing family and friends in extended series, trying to bring out "the theatricality and drama of everyday life." The day he was supposed to register for his first classes at Columbia was 9/11, and he suddenly found himself interested in photographing strangers for the first time, seeing them "as part of the extended human family," he says. "I was thinking these were the people I could be pulling from the wreckage of a building, or they could be pulling me." Soon President Bush issued the call to "go to the stores and shop to deal with this tragedy," Ulrich



"Smithhaven, NY, 2003" by Brian Ulrich, "Torso" by Dave Hudson

says. Having grown up with family members' eyewitness accounts of the World War II bombings of Hamburg, he found this "terribly ironic, very screwed up." He began photographing shoppers and recalls visiting Wal-Marts where CNN was being played on monitors so that "you could watch Baghdad get bombed and buy your rifle or a new box of Tide." He also started to read books on retail design and came to understand how stores are "thought out and designed" to woo the consumer.

The nearly 100 artists in "ART AT WAR" at Aldo Castillo deal with war more explicitly. This is a riotously diverse show of paintings, sculptures, photographs, and mixed-media works from some two dozen countries. If Ulrich's particular notions about shopping are part of what makes his work successful, some of the artists here flounder amid vague and unformed ideas—given the history of modern art, for example, fragmenting the human body doesn't necessarily convey violence or produce revulsion. But other pieces do conceptualize war—

often as a physical attack on its victims—with a precision similar to Ulrich's. Gretchen Minnhaar's wide painting *Fences* shows figures seemingly imprisoned in a forest of vertical bands; her note questions whether we build fences for "security or isolation?" Lorna Marsh's untitled diptych riven down the center shows an abstracted version of a ruined landscape—there's a band of bomb or bullet shapes, another that's a chaotic mix of shapes, and a third of babies in fetal curls.

Two of the best pieces offer double meanings. Dave Hudson's sculpture *Torso* has innards consisting of metal conduit, wires, and rubber tubes—the artist conflates the ripping away of flesh with the machines that are our weapons. Ed Paschke's witty print *Missile* shows just one object, which looks like a cross between a bullet and a lipstick tube, as a comment on how "good and evil can be interchangeable depending on one's perspective." The creepiest piece in the show, it doesn't just assert that war is hell but that war and weapons are sexy. —Fred Camper