



STEVEN EVANS, *Untitled (Bearded Face)*, 1998. Altered mask in wooden and glass case, 51 x 21 x 12".

STEVEN EVANS

RUPERT GOLDSWORTHY

The modern funeral parlor is a subdued relic of an era when mourning women wore black gowns and jewelry made from the hair of their deceased loved ones. In his elegiac art, Steven Evans reclaims fin-de-siècle funerary protocols for the turn of our own century.

Evans adapts Victorian customs to minimalist aesthetics, evoking a Gothic mood with a series of three black paintings against burnt orange walls. On close inspection, the paintings turn out to be black flower arrangements on black taffeta, barely discernible as matte areas against shining surfaces. These are the accouterments of Victorian rituals of mourning, isolated as in an inventory: an arrangement of violets, a single flower, a wreath that functions as a woman's hair piece. The theme of visual display is pursued with two cases — cabinets of curiosity — resembling turn-of-the-century curios. One features a cut-out of the interior of an opera house, with its orchestra and box seats populated by silhouettes. Such a scene might speak to the castes of 19th-century society, but we are left wondering. More pathetic is the artifact in another case, a wire mesh mask with closed eyes. Framing the transparent face is a mane of human hair with a full salt-and-pepper beard recalling that of Walt Whitman. Imbued with care and affection, the mask may refer to the careful reconstruction of a face seen only in memory.

Evans's Romantic concern with the sublimity of death might be compared with that of Ross Bleckner, Hunter Reynolds, Oliver Herring, and others who have responded to a generation of AIDS-related deaths with art of astounding beauty.

Grady T. Turner