

March 14-20, 1997



LIZ YOUNG: "I Wish You Were Here, I Wish I Was Here"

At POST GALLERY

1904 E. Seventh Place,
downtown

Through March 15

Liz Young at Post

Maudlin musings on death

curdle to black humor in Liz Young's installation "I Wish You Were Here, I Wish I Was Here." Her aesthetic, reminiscent of America during the Depression, evokes that era's ethos as well: death is examined with the severity and humor of William Faulkner.

Thirteen painted portraits of Young's deceased relatives dot the far wall. The five sitters' smile-for-the-camera poses contrast with the macabre — and labor-intensive — rendering of the portraits in Young's own blood. *Norma* appears in nurse's uniform, gently smiling like a professional woman of the '50s: A tier of three wallet-size portraits follows her from shy youth to tentative adulthood. *Roy* is a soft-eyed young man whose posed head looks out with eternal youth, his stiff rounded collar dating him to some long-past era. The one-liner of dead people rendered in the blood of one of their "blood" is tempered by the delicate beauty of Young's handling of the pigment, which emulates the consistency of oil paint. Where thickly applied for clothes and hair, it is cracked like the aged surface of an old-master painting; facial contours are glazed with transparent carmine.

Patterns for crude burial boxes (large, medium and two small — i.e., for a family of four) are branded on cheap plywood panels that cover two more gallery walls; blank sheets of plywood complete the fourth. The plans are laid out economically on each panel and labeled: "end of small box 16"x10"," "side of large box 1'5"x2'6"," etc. However, the number and dimensions of the boxes don't match those of the family pictured, opening the narrative to metaphorical readings (especially as the only children pictured in the portraits are followed through to adulthood, Young's dead family members are certainly buried already, and the blank plywood implicitly awaits the branding of more boxes). This contrasts with Young's very literal painting of the family portraits, which do not evoke sadness in the viewer so much as exemplify — literally — Young's "blood relations." The morbidly explicit measurements for the boxes, on the other hand, unceremoniously pose questions about the logistics of our own deaths. Blunting sentiment with materiality, Liz Young makes death appear not just inevitable but incongruous.

—Ingrid Calame