



Shari Hatt, 1999. *Untitled (Salem)*. C-print, 16" x 16"

where the conventions begin to disintegrate. Special status notwithstanding, the subjects of these portraits are hairy, tail-sniffing creatures with yellowing teeth and exuberant tongues. If we were face-to-face with them, instead of just with their likenesses, we would hear them panting, whimpering and barking, see them wiggle and strain in their collars, feel their hot breath on our faces and smell the full and complex odour of whatever they most recently ingested. How are we to reconcile this unstated knowledge with the information provided in the photographs?

As Hatt plays with conventions, the role of the artist as creator emerges. For Hatt is not only working with one of the most frequently explored genres of art, but has also selected a familiar, clichéd subject to portray. Her decision to work within such familiar terri-

tory allows her to challenge our understanding of not just the conventions of portraiture but also the essence of how we formulate our belief in, and understanding of, the subject of the portrait itself.

Hatt's choice of genre and subject-matter in picture-making also allows her to consider the boundaries between fine and popular art, highbrow appreciation and kitsch. In her work, Hatt alludes to Holbein and Rembrandt canvases and to painting-on-velvet; to Karsh's glamorous studies and to department-store studio portraits; to workaday images on passports and identity cards and the whole spectrum of doggie calendar art. As Hatt travels between high and low art, the viewer is unable to situate her work comfortably in either realm.

Hatt plays with these contradictions while focusing her lens on a very accessible subject. In this way she is challenging the notion of placing fine art on a pedestal as much she is working within its conventions. Is Hatt's work about elevating popular art, or about bringing down the level of snobbery in fine art, or is it more an attempt at a leveling or democratization of the playing field? Whatever the

case, Hatt is engaged in an intriguing experiment, producing art that is surprisingly playful but never superficial or facile.

Hatt's *Dogs* have been let out from September 6 to October 19 at Winnipeg's Plug-In Gallery, where they will share wall-space with images Hatt prepared during a stint as official photographer at the Liberace Museum in Las Vegas, Nevada. Nine of the canine photographs are also touring internationally in *A Thousand Hounds*, organized by the Cygnet Foundation of New York City.

Vivian Tors
Visual Artist
Ottawa, Ont.

Vessel of light

This child dying of neuroblastoma had become translucent sort of like a soft white light bulb you know, the kind guaranteed to last 10 000 hours at 100 lumens. Who could I call now that her warranty had expired? I tried, oh believe me, I tried to contact some divine light source who could replace her fragile filament but I received no answer.

Unless this was it. The child in her mother's arms, her vessel of light extinguished.

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