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ARTS & PERFORMANCE

All the way down to the details

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Details erased, obscured, and bleached into a sea of white like the glaring desert sun can tell a

GALLERIES story just as intriguing as one packed with

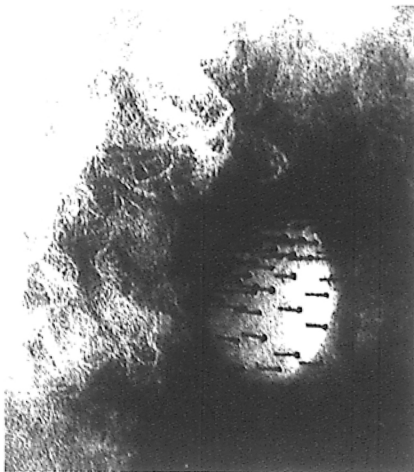
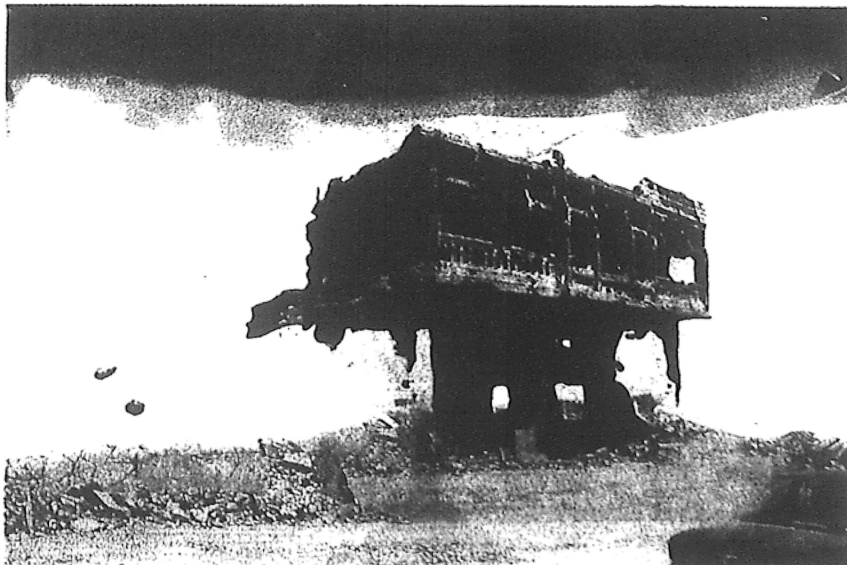
information. Chicago artist Curtis Mann and Saudi Arabian Jowhara ALSaud make photo-based art for their two-person show at Howard Yezerki Gallery, but they've omitted a great deal from the original photographs.

Mann's work is particularly searing. He downloads photos of sites of conflict taken by amateur photographers who have posted their images on Flickr. He drops his disk off at the drugstore and has prints made. Then he takes them home, coats pieces of them with varnish, and pours bleach over them in the sink. The bleach washes away the parts of an image not protected with varnish.

The results, jagged scenes that pop off pages of white shimmering into yellow and red, effectively convey landscapes stripped by battle. Mann has washed out some of the supports holding up the subject of "Building, Standing (Beirut)," so the crumbling structure barely holds itself up amid the unearthly white. Above, the sky is blue, bleached at the bottom edge to party-girl pink, smearing into the white.

Mann uses bleach as if it were paint, and his most ambitious piece, "After the Dust When You Come Over the Hill (Beirut)," has a gorgeous painterly quality in the way he uses his bleach and in the way the image flutters between representation and abstraction. The piece features 84 8-by-10-inch photos in a grid. The pink-fringed blue sky is a banner at the top; dry earth and rubble cross the bottom. In between, shards of photographs trail across the whiteness, as if a blast has just occurred and we're in the pocket of silence and disbelief just afterward, with these shreds of images like shrapnel.

ALSaud, who attended Wellesley College and the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, makes work that comments on censorship and attitudes toward women in Saudi Arabia. "Skirts are crudely lengthened and sleeves added to women's outfits in magazines with black markers," she explains in her artist's state-



Top: Curtis Mann's "Building, Standing (Beirut)." Above left: "Today's Tomorrow" by June Ahrens. Above right: from Sharon Harper's "One Month, Weather Permitting."

ment. "Figurative work is still considered by many to be sinful."

She photographs friends, then traces them, leaving out many details. She etches the drawing into a negative of a photo of an envelope, or a scrap of corrugated cardboard, providing background. The results are glossy and inviting, yet blank-faced and satisfyingly enigmatic. "Halos" shows two women in sleeveless tops, one with her arm around the other, who covers her face with her hand. Are they posing;

or is this a moment of grief discreetly captured? ALSaud has erased their facial features, so there's no telling. Here, the work raises issues of self-revelation. In her homeland, it's more politically charged. Either way, it's provocative.

A hint of danger

The variety of textures, colors, and unexpected materials in sculptor June Ahrens's show at Trustman Art Gallery at Simmons College is enchanting: The

highlight, a diptych titled "Today's Tomorrow," consists of two cottony, cloud-like circles, each more than 5 feet in diameter, made from fiberglass filters. It looks so soft you'd want to jump into it, but fiberglass is dangerous, and Ahrens had to wear gloves, goggles, and other protective gear while working with it. The piece beckons, but it's laced with threat.

Tufted with blue and white, the circles seem to gather light. In one, the blue cloud funnels

JOWHARA ALSAUD AND CURTIS

MANN: Altered States

At: Howard Yezerki Gallery, 460 Harrison Ave., through April 14. 617-262-0550. www.howardyezerki-gallery.com

JUNE AHRENS: Today's Tomorrow

At: Trustman Art Gallery, Simmons College, 300 The Fenway, through April 17. 617-521-2268. www.simmons.edu/trustman

SHARON HARPER: Twelve Hours From Winter To Spring

At: Proof, 516 East Second St., South Boston, through April 25. 508-963-9102. www.proof-gallery.com

toward a hole near the bottom right, where Ahrens has pounded small iron stakes. It's like the eye of a hurricane, and we're peering through to see vulnerable trees below. In other works, she makes a mandala of clipped-together safety pins and playful collages of mesh and felt held together with slithery applications of hot glue. Always, she has a keen eye for form, and just a hint of danger lurking beneath the fun.

Time tested

Photographer Sharon Harper's two bodies of work at Proof eloquently consider time passing, a theme that inevitably dwarfs us. In "One Month, Weather Permitting," she opened her lens for long exposures of the night sky over Banff in Alberta, Canada, in the fall of 2007. The stars do the drawing, or more accurately, the earth's rotation does.

One image shot Sept. 19, 20, and 21 looks like a concert of shooting stars. Some drop in an arc to the right, others shoot along a sharp diagonal. Harper illuminates patterns we know exist, but can't ourselves see.

For "Twelve Hours From Winter to Spring," she has lined up 27 prints of photos taken from a cross-country flight from Alaska to Boston, with an apparent layover somewhere in between. The progression captivates. With a long exposure, what must be the moon appears to jiggle in the sky like a flashlight. Shots of the Canadian Rockies give way to snow-scattered plains. Harper reminds us that a simple flight is a compression of an epic journey.