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AROUND THE GALLERIES

Photos show everyday life amid catastrophe

Art reviews: Karin Apollonia Müller, Hirsch Perlman, Jimmy Baker, Bill Komoski

By Christopher Knight, Times Staff Writer

Excerpt:

Considering the end of the world

The small project room at Roberts & Tilton is painted black, but a spot of light flickers at the rear wall. There, a boxy black shelf cradles a cellphone.

Open, the elegant slim-line model plays a brief loop on its media screen, showing Saddam Hussein being hanged. The searing work is a high-tech reliquary housing splinters of what looks like a horrific modern martyrdom. Cincinnati-based artist **Jimmy Baker** titles his L.A. gallery debut "Rapture," and it oscillates between two primary meanings of that word: engulfing emotion and what some Christian sects believe are events announcing the end of the world.

In the main room, a Rodin-like "Gates of Hell" is made from two doors of a black Chevy Suburban, each mounted on a stand. One is riddled with seven bullet holes going into the interior, the other with a pair of bullet holes leading out. The gateway opens onto a row of photographs showing wintry rural landscapes populated by rifle-toting men wearing ski masks.

Other photographs show twisted satellite pictures of the North and South poles — the ends of the Earth gone awry. A nearby iPod audio-triptych plays recordings of musical mayhem.

Four dark paintings of young men are paired with four creamy portraits of young women, earphones isolating the girls in acoustical space and dramatic lighting virtually irradiating the boys. Glass covers the paintings. Baker has etched some panels into filters for perceiving disaffected youth, creating patterned auras and Latin tattoos.

Whether the sitters in these compelling portraits are benign is anybody's guess, but ambiguity is central to their interest. Baker has a knack for creating a disorienting theatrical environment, and the thrum of anxiety is germane. A viewer is thrust into the uncomfortable position of looking for trouble — which leads inevitably back to the gruesome reliquary chamber.

Roberts & Tilton, 6150 Wilshire Blvd., (323) 549-0223, through June 23. Closed Sunday and Monday. www.robertsandtilton.com+v