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## JANE STEVENS' SWING-LENS PHOTOGRAPHS ABSORBING

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There is something unsettling about **Jane Alden Stevens'** photographs.

Perhaps it's the format. **Stevens** uses a turn-of-the-century swing-lens camera to create panoramic black-and-white images that are slightly curved, slightly distorted, giving the viewer more visual information than the naked eye can provide in one glance. This may be why their breadth is slightly disconcerting. Maybe it's the subject matter.

**Stevens** photographs people in unusual circumstances in unspecified rural back yards, creeks and cemeteries, leaving the viewer to imagine the befores and the afters, the narratives that will make sense of these strange scenes.

And maybe it's a combination of these two factors, form and content, that make **Stevens'** photographs so unsettling. Viewing them is like coming in late and leaving early at a foreign film. The images are striking, and you're not sure what they mean, but they stick with you all the same.

Several characters, such as Lloyd and Judy, appear again and again in separate photos. In one image, they stand stoically in front of a massive, well-ordered woodpile. In another, Judy stands in front of sheets on a clothes line, while Lloyd's face is covered by a blowing sheet as if by a veil or shroud. In a third, the couple are on a well-kept back porch, looking innocently at the camera, as if unaware of the taxidermic animals that surround them.

In "Bandaged Boy," a child lies entangled in some inexplicable netting. Is he dead, or just playing? It's impossible to tell from **Stevens'** photographs, which pose more questions than they answer.

**Stevens** employs several strategies to create these mysteries. She often crops off her subjects' heads, or obscures them with hats or shadows. The strength of the work lies in **Stevens'** faith in the viewer, whom she trusts has enough imagination and life experience to fill in the blanks left by her images. This strategy teaches viewers as much about themselves as about **Stevens'** subjects.

**Stevens'** photos are on view at Pittsburgh Filmmakers Photo Gallery (477 Melwood Ave.) until March 9.

-- Sewing and ceramics, cooking and child rearing, body image and beauty products: These are, of course, subjects traditionally associated with women. And the women artists who have produced work for "Of the Spirit" don't deny this. In fact, they use these subjects as a kind of artistic language to express the power, and critique the limitations, inherent in the idea of "woman's work."

One of the most provocative pieces in this show is Eve Sandler's "Queen High Maintenance" series. Sandler weaves long, bright red "press-on" fingernails into synthetic black hair falls and braids. Her works are beautiful hanging assemblages. But they're also smart commentary on the synthetic "lengths" to which women go to achieve a beauty ideal.

Charlotte Richardson-Ka's "Framed Then Slavery, Framed Now Racism" is a strong, two-part work that looks at the past and the present of the African- American experience. But Richardson-Ka makes these two parts of her work look an awful lot alike -- and this is where her message really lies.

There are so many thought-provoking works in this exhibition, it's hard to single out just a few. Vivian Poey's large-scale color photographs identify a horrifying dimension to the mundane acts of fixing and eating food. And don't miss Grace Y. Williams' "**Swing** Low Sweet Chariot," an updated child fetish object that incorporates everything from seashells and feathers to old 45 rpm records.

"Of the Spirit" is an exhibition of works by women artists of color who belong to Women of Visions, Inc. The show runs until March 3 at the Pittsburgh Center for the Arts (6300 Fifth Ave.).

In conjunction with the show, artist and exhibition juror Joyce Scott will deliver a lecture on Saturday, March 2, at the center.

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**Illustration:** PHOTO

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