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By Cate McQuaid, Globe Correspondent | August 6, 2008

Extreme views Of the two group shows now at Bromfield Gallery, "Blow-Up," a juried exhibit of photo-based work chosen by photographer Harvey Stein, is the better. The theme covers explosions, hugely pregnant women, inflatable toys, and weapons, and you'd think that would be all over the place, but because it's all so extreme it hangs together beautifully.

Highlights include Alison Jones's "Karo Elder, Ethiopia," showing a vividly painted Ethiopian holding up a machine gun, and Andy Bloxham's "Beta 19," in which the photographer seems to have caught a man in the act, examining his inflatable doll with a stethoscope in bed. Andy Holzman's "Deluge," a black-and-white photo, illuminates driving rain, looking like a shower of sparks over a boat's prow.

The Boston chapter of the Women's Caucus for Art mounts "A Woman's Place," a throwback of an exhibit. It's not that women's issues don't need to be voiced, but in the last 10 or 20 years, the art world has hardly ignored those issues. It's redundant to make a special show for them.

Still, some of the work is strong. I enjoyed Kelly Kerrigan's painting "An Elaborate Costume Before Dinner Is in Excessively Bad Taste," which equates the broad diameter of a woman's hoop skirt with the dinner table. June August's monotype "Murakami Dress" sets the bustled silhouette of a 19th-century woman in bold blue against a backdrop of the bobbing smiley faces of contemporary artist Takashi Murakami. "A Woman's Place" doesn't have the same meaning it once did, at least in Western countries, and so, unlike "Blow-Up," the show as a whole feels nebulous.

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