

CULTURAL CHATTER

BY KRISTA REESE

THE ART OF HOLIDAY GIFT GIVING

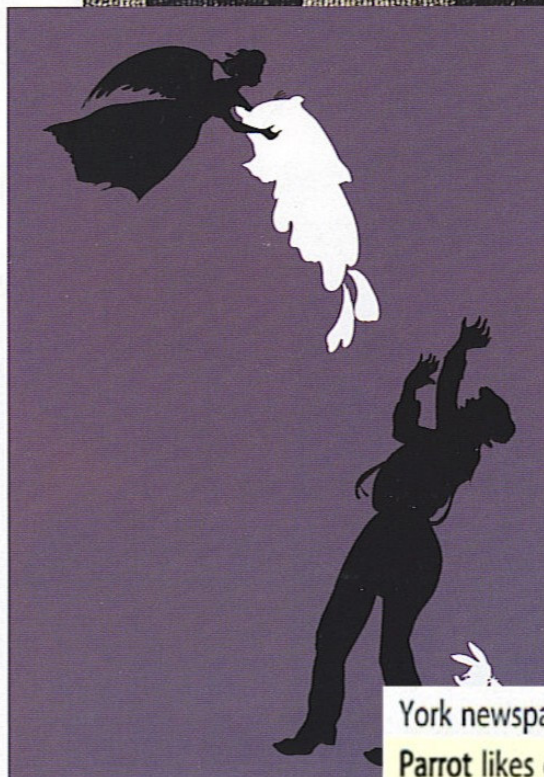
The thought of holiday shopping turns me into a muttering Dickensian hermit. Hunched over my keyboard in frayed fingerless gloves, I contemplate the parking-lot vertigo, the bronchially afflicted crowds, the chain-store déjà vu. But there's only one species sadder than a Scrooge. That's the dreamy, dedicated shopper who keeps looking for loot in all the wrong places while faithfully conjuring what psychologists call a phantom family. You know, the ever-loving, nonjudgmental and jolly kind, invented for just this time of year. The delusion that gifts will reunite them all in love and wonder leads many to mall-induced desperation and Christmas-morning tragedies involving acid-washed-jean outfits and knit ponchos.

Don't let this happen to you. Buy what you really want for the quirky, wonderful and sometimes difficult people you like and love (or are related to), or for yourself. Find something as unique as a spirit and as handmade as Boo Radley's carvings, something that enriches your environment or represents

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Atlanta in a way you've never thought about. Where, you wonder? Holiday art sales. You'll find everything from the intellectually challenging long-term investment to a good laugh for a song (er, carol).

Some holiday art sales can draw the Tiny Tim out of even cynical souls like myself. Take, for example, Susan Bridges' annual Big Angel Blowout (814 Edgewood Avenue; 404-688-1892) from November 16th to 19th, a show that heralds the beginning of the season with the faithful regularity of the old Norelco "floating heads" Santa. She packs her rambling Victorian house in Inman Park with works from a variety of artists, jewelry makers, potters, sculptors and painters who fashion everything from \$5 ornaments (in past years, I've gotten tiny Al Green shrines, shiny red tin-snipped devils, Clyde Broadway angels and tattooed gourds) to works priced up to a couple of thousand dollars. Wander through the house and grounds, if nothing else than to see the works of Bridges' favorites, such as painter Tracy Wagner, who uses Dick-and-Jane-style figures in increasingly complex and evocative illustrative backgrounds. Many



Clockwise from top: Christopher Parrot's *Reveal*; Tracy Wagner's *Frolic*; one in *The Emancipation Approximation* series by Kara Walker.

paintings will likely hang in Brick Bazaar, a recently refurbished and redesigned Whitespace gallery (see whitespace814.com). Broadly speaking, they have flown with the painter back

home, but you'll find works from Red Weldon Sandlin fusing pottery, drawing, boxes and often folktales and myths in a trompe l'oeil effect. (She's also known for her work in the *Atlanta Peach* newspaper); representational artist Christopher Parrot likes charcoal drawings (\$900 for his *Reveal*, which might be a fashion designer contemplating two models, or a guy trying to work his way into or out of a ménage à trois). Rocio Rodriguez's dreamy