

# The artist as comedian and tragedian

Two views of the 'tortured' modern artist at 450 Harrison Ave. in Boston's South End

by John Ruggieri

**'Cary S. Leibowitz/Candyass: New Works,'** at the Clifford • Smith Gallery, Boston, through March 6.

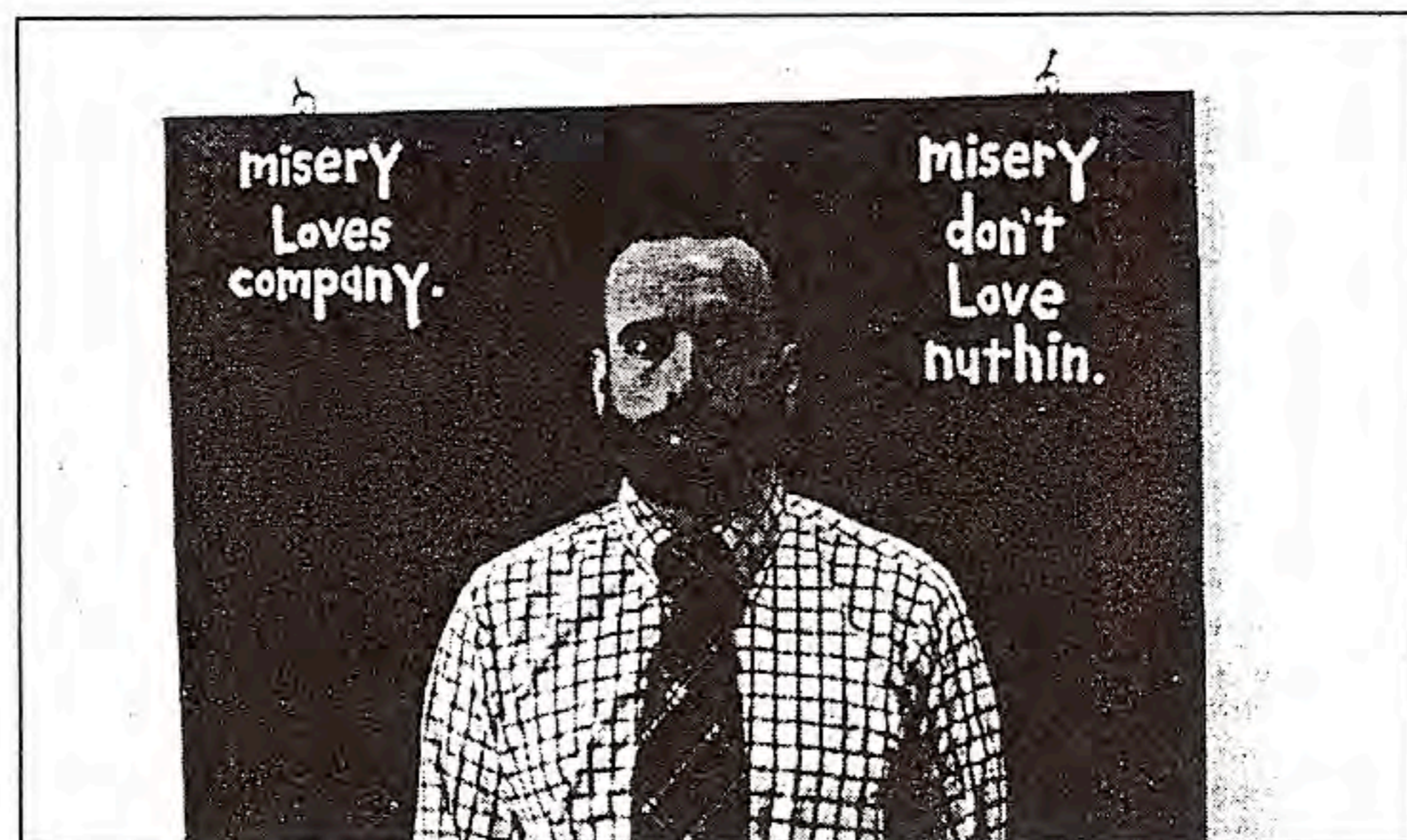
BRING BACK THE TORTURED ARTIST! I say (with a chuckle). In two exhibitions happening now, we glimpse two very different but compelling portraits of the scraggly emotional states of the contemporary visual artist. Cary Leibowitz, in the guise of his pseudonym-alter ego Candyass, makes bright, sarcastic word paintings that seem to be simple, biting one-liners but also reveal the daily reality of being an artist. On another seemingly unrelated hand, Francesca Woodman's photographs of parts of her nude self slithering in decayed domestic spaces seem to be about revealing but ultimately are enigmatic anti-stories.

Lucy, dog-in-residence at the Clifford • Smith Gallery, trots leisurely around the high-sheen floor, scanning for an affectionate hand as the gallery is readied for Leibowitz's opening reception. Leibowitz's work also reaches out from all angles for attention. Various sized slick-painted panels and works on paper on the wall mingle with sarcasm-bitten vintage photographs and special Candyass "products" such as rain slickers urging "LIZA MINNELLI FOR PRESIDENT" modeled by scary manikins, with the requisite mug and canvas tote thrown in for that faux-corporate high.

Leibowitz advertises a certain Jewish, gay, campy, acerbic, self-gorging artistic identity

that is strangely familiar. I am reminded of all those friends and acquaintances—and myself at the height of art-fag angst—who have had no problem with being morose and overly ironic, especially the more intense of these artists whose lives are (and were) pure edge. Though his work has the appearance of being quick and glib, it nicely posits an unofficial place for the alienated intellectual in the USA, dolled up in a candy-colored rain poncho, while "live" local TV programming in the gallery acts as the barometer of authenticity, spontaneity, and the present moment. Leibowitz's targets include himself, hyperproduced art video installation, artistic posing, the quest for happiness, commodified self-improvement, reified and refried patriotism, and the now-derided antics of modernists.

Like Lucy the adorable gallery pooch, Leibowitz, too, is apparently seeking some love or, more accurately, the opportunity to offer "free decorating advice with every handjob!", as one piece reads. His post-modern proverbs beg us to guffaw ("modern art sucks. you're fat.") and to sort-of think ("attention! all art critics must wash hands before leaving!"). His newest slogan is emblazoned on plastic shopping bags: "SAD AINT BAD." His work is about an ironic distance common to many post-Warhol conceptualists, and yet be they about integrity or post-integrity, his error-filled typewritten journals included in previous shows reveal a disarmingly human poet (who doesn't always spell well) and the daily, unheroic drag and sometime joy of making and thinking art.



Cary S. Leibowitz/ Candyass pictured with 'Misery Loves Company' panel, at Clifford • Smith, through March 6.