

ART REVIEWS

By DAVID PAGEL
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

Multilevel: Doug Harvey's first solo show in Los Angeles is one of the weirdest ever. A three-dimensional rebus that's impossible to solve, this meandering installation at Post Gallery follows a logic all its own to form an odd portrait of contemporary culture and to weave a loosely linked network of connections that make some kind of sense, however wacky.

Titled "St. Sebastian Tom Sawyer Cathy Mishima Expo 67," Harvey's esoteric extravaganza includes a brief Super-8 film of Tom Sawyer painting a fence, hundreds of cut-out comic strips depicting the hapless cartoon character Cathy, a teddy bear dressed up like the Japanese novelist who committed suicide the old-fashioned way and a mural representing a domed pavilion designed by Buckminster Fuller for an international exposition in Canada.

If that sounds far-flung, it's only the beginning of Harvey's fiendishly fertile array of homemade objects and images. The cut-out Cathies rain down from the ceiling, having been spewed from a painted whale's blowhole. The Mishima bear's synthetic intestines are dotted with tiny music boxes that play "Over the Rainbow" from "The Wizard of Oz."

Fuller's dome is depicted as it burns down, three years after the

exposition. To make up for this loss, Harvey provides three model pavilions: a dome made of cigarettes, another made of cotton swabs and a third in the form of a cornucopia, standing on its pointed end and filled with the same foam insulation that spills from Mishima's guts.

St. Sebastian is nowhere to be found, but a pair of plastic swords sprouting human hairs like a porcupine's quills recall the pierced martyr, as does a shower curtain bedecked with grisly images of notorious murders. Three battery-operated wigs jitter around on the floor, buzzing and beeping as if caught up in St. Vitus' dance.

Stuck in one corner, a miniature diorama of a contemporary art exhibition causes the rest of Harvey's installation to swell to Brobdingnagian dimensions. The longer you peruse this exhibition's seemingly disconnected components, the more links you see between and among them.

At its best, Harvey's art makes the most outlandish conspiracy theorist look like a stodgy logician. Exceptionally flexible, and willing to embrace the slimmest coincidences, the thinking that holds his show together operates on many wavelengths simultaneously.

■ *Post Gallery, 1904 E. 7th Place, (213) 488-3379, through Nov. 8. Closed Sunday-Tuesday.*