

Exhibit captures curator's personality

"Representing the Intangible" at the Photographic Resource Center, Boston University, through April 28.

Curated by the collage-photographer John O'Reilly, "Representing the Intangible" is a show chock full of work, with thematic and compositional threads run-

VISUAL ARTS Mary Sherman

ning throughout, while allowing each piece to remain a discrete object in its own right.

The telling, visual clue of what to expect from the exhibit is the show's first piece, an elaborately dense collage, "The Fortune Teller."

This consists of about 100 different figures of varying scale pieced around an engraving of a fortune teller like various clients, but more likely representing the figures of a person's past and future.

Next to the piece is a photographic variation on this theme, a photographer's shop filled, again, with figures of varying scale, but these people are cardboard cutouts arranged as advertisements.

Both works clearly are related

to O'Reilly's own work (not included in the show), which includes re-photographed and elaborately arranged black-and-white images.

As such, both introduce the show as a kind of self-portrait of the artist O'Reilly as curator, arranging other artists' black-and-white pictures to fit into a collage of an exhibit.

The works on view range from such well-known artists as Jacques-Henri Lartigue, represented by delightful pictures of his youth, John Coplans, O. Winston Link, Dieter Appelt, Duane Michals, Gary Winogrand, James Casabere, August Sander and Toshio Shibata as well as a number of local notables, including Karl Baden, Abe Morell and the late Mark Morrisroe, among others.

Interspersed are some noteworthy standouts such as the mystic works by Seth Rubin and the stunning, seductively simple picture of spilled liquid, "Spilled Core on Linoleum" by Tim Davis.

To round out the show are a number of striking, anonymous pictures as well as collections of photo albums, postcards and a large, gridlike arrangement of postcards by John Pijewski.

What loosely unites the work is the idea that the photographs set out to capture such intangibles as love, life, youth and other themes that hover just beyond one's grasp.

The reasoning for each choice is easy to find in the gallery handout in which O'Reilly briefly explains the thoughts behind each work's inclusion.

Even without this pamphlet, however, the inclusion of many of the pieces, such as Thomas Roma's photographs of religious ecstasy from his series "Come Sunday," Tom Papageorge's image of a nude woman lost in sensual reverie in "Zuma Beach," Rubin's photo of a rectangle of light falling on his studio floor or David Chow's photographic collection of dead people are an understandable fit for O'Reilly's aims.

Others, such as Link's stunning photograph of a train, "NW13," is not an obvious suggestion of time, but it does, as O'Reilly points out, make a fine, visual counterpoint to Appelt's picture of his breath — caught on a mirror that in turn blots out his face.

On the other hand, Baden's intense, obsessive photographing of his face every day for decades creates an eerie sense of time,

even though Baden seems to have hardly aged at all.

Other distinguished juxtapositions include Winogrand's memorable photograph, "New Mexico," of a young child captured in the blinding sun, her scooter overturned on the driveway and the distant landscape looking every bit like a nuclear test site.

Equally arresting is Robert Adam's "Colorado Springs #3" in which a woman is silhouetted in a '50s tract house, like a figure from a sitcom, frozen on a TV screen.

On the other end of the emotional scale is one of the show's more charming juxtapositions — Morell's photo of children's blocks, looming as large as a skyscraper, set against Lartigue's picture of his toy cars, shot from ground level.

Not all the images of children, however, seem so sweetly nostalgic. Helen Levitt's portrait of two masked children intensely staring out at the viewer is particularly chilling.

Throughout, the images play off one another to create an elaborate orchestration of narratives, compositional devices, shifts in tone, perspective and scale. If compared to a piece of music, the show would certainly be a splendid fugue.