

What, search for a Melmac world of flamingo-pink amoeboid wall sconces and tropic-acqua scalloped valances? Of shark-finned automobiles and duck's ass hairdos? Of Desi and Lucy and Ralph and Alice? For what? Mom's still sitting somewhere sipping vodka tonics—looking for the third queen that will give her this round of gin—wishing that Ellery Queen's latest would show up at the drugstore in paperback.

No sense trying to smother all that and all it connotes under an all-purpose blanket of nostalgia. It's with us yet: every night when the young girl's mind (what is she, twelve? thirteen?) assumes the body of her adult self, forcing misinterpretation of phrases overheard, of events held by elders to be sacred—at worst, harmless—ritual.

Nightmares, like photographs and ancient myths, stew together truth, untruth, and half-truth into mixtures we will never clarify. When critic David Elliott calls Patty Carroll Chicago's "Champ of Cheap," he uses a phrase we can not take lightly. Chicago, nexus of Imagist art and of all forms of late Expressionism, Surrealism, and Camp, surely doesn't lack contenders for the title. But Carroll's unique contribution is in recognizing dusk's transubstantiation of what's left of the daytime world of two decades ago into tonight's bad dream. It's not a world she created—it's the one we all inherit.