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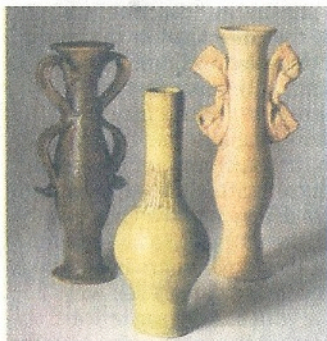
Four shows worth a gander this holiday season

BY LANCE ESPLUND

Despite the economic doldrums, there's much to catch the eye, if not open the purse-strings, at New York galleries this holiday season. Among the offerings: three shows on Chelsea's West 25th Street and an exhibition dedicated to Eros on the Upper East Side.

'Alice Federico'

George Billis Gallery
(511 W. 25th St.; 212-645-2621)
Through Dec. 20



In Alice Federico's third solo show at George Billis, she continues to explore, and to reinvent, the classical Greek vase form in works roughly 18 inches high. Her slender, stately ceramic vases—brown, cream, green or gun-metal amphorae with wide

that realm between functional object and sculpture. In this recent body of work, however, Ms. Federico has incorporated unusual handles. Sometimes decorative, sometimes practical, the handles give lift, haughtiness, personality and pomp-and-circumstance to her graceful hourglass forms. The handles take on a range of associations. Many are symmetrical come-hither curves that add hands-on-hips punctuation. Others zip like lightning, pour slowly down the vases' sides, or extend like flying buttresses. Others still, resembling bowties, leaves, cauliflower ears, fluttering ribbons, braids and wings, add whimsical notation and Baroque flair—at times elevating or steadying the vases' necks like attending winged putti. Ms. Federico's vases evoke classical antiquity; her handles bring those forms into the here-and-now.