

## Report from season's First Thursday

# What's up at the galleries?

by Will Shank

A strange San Francisco ritual takes place on the first Thursday evening of every month at an innocuous-looking office building in downtown San Francisco. Beginning around 5:30 or 6 p.m., swarms of business people, SoMa alternative types, and art-lovers of all stripes slowly filter into the lobby to wait for a ride in a bank of elevators to the four floors of galleries at 49 Geary Street. For several hours, the elevator doors burst open onto the 2nd, 3rd, 4th or 5th floor of the office tower, and the faithful spill into the corridors. In a sort of vertically stacked art mall, office-like spaces reveal their interiors to be filled with the latest offerings from some of San Francisco's premiere art galleries. And the culture vultures drink it up, along with cheap jug wine (and in at

least one exceptionally raucous gallery, hard booze).

On the first Thursday of September, these were among the most viewable installations:

At Fraenkel Gallery, Frish Brandt and Jeffrey Fraenkel have assembled a remarkable group of psychological portraits and self-portraits in the exhibition *About Faces*, which runs through October 28. The selections run from classic modernism (Stieglitz on O'Keeffe, 1933, and Man Ray on Meret Oppenheim, 1934) to the contemporary and startling, such as Hiroshi Sugimoto's Catherine Parr (1999), which at first glance appears to be another Cindy Sherman impersonation of an English monarch, but which definitely is *not*. The photos range from Avedon's black-and-white portrait of President Ike in retirement in 1964, to a double view of the battered faces of Por-

tuguese bullfighters.

And for those who find the prices at Fraenkel astronomical, there is hope: in the last gallery, a Teleface Telephone is on sale for only \$45.

*Aural Sex*, at Catharine Clark Gallery, is an exhibition of artists who work in sound. (It reflects other acoustic-based installations around town, including one at San Francisco and Oakland's twin CCAC galleries.) There are some hits and some misses in this intriguing concept show curated by Marcia Tanner. The inherent difficulty in presenting sound installations in a relatively small space is that they compete with each other far more than visual artworks. Some of the installations suffer from juxtaposition.

"Bibbity Bop" is an abstracted pornographic video cartoon with a goofy soundtrack that makes sex fun. Three thousand animation stills have been assembled by Chicago artist Alison Ruttan into a giddily jumping series of Miró-like shapes which fuck each other silly.

Sheri Simons' "Inert Raga," a padded room, provides a contemplative moment within the bombardment of sounds elsewhere in the gallery. The visitor may close in on whispering speakers by lying down in a womb-like chamber with a view of a ceiling-mounted, slit-shaped monitor, or hang from a rubber sling.

Adriana Arenas' "Sweet Illusion" is a Rohrshach double-video of cotton candy being spun to the tune of a Spanish-language love ballad. Filmed high above the artist's native Bogotá, it shows the confection evaporating at the high altitude. The video and its accompanying karaoke sing-along soundtrack made me laugh.

At the other end of the spectrum, Reuben Lorch-Miller has installed a dignified-looking minimalist piece which looks like the overhead fluorescent lights of your average office. Beaming down from it, however, is a human "hum," a juxtaposition which is the height of ridiculousness.

Extra bonus: By calling (415) 399-1439 after gallery hours, you can hear the voice of *Aural Sex* in the privacy of your own home. Through October 7.

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