

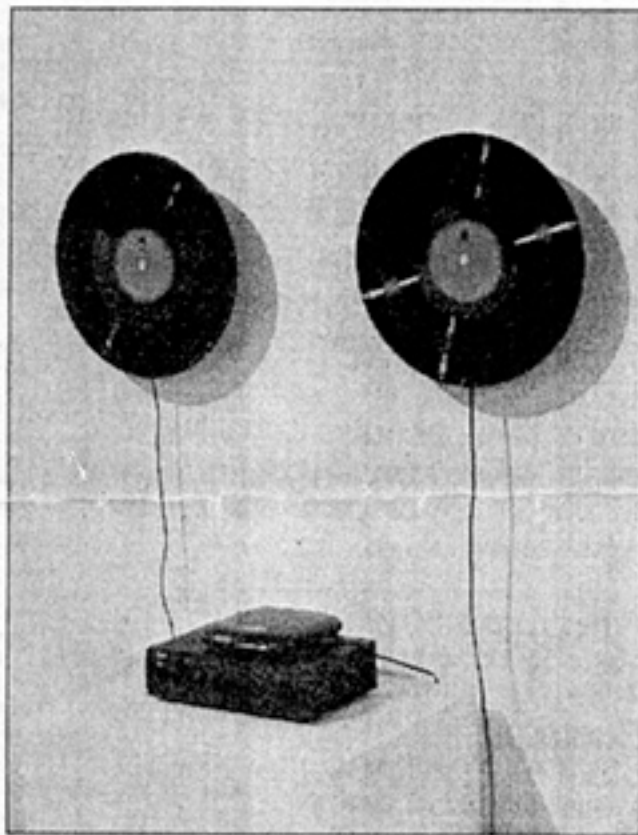
critic's choice: art

'Aural Sex'

Through Oct. 7, Catherine Clark Gallery

Aural Sex is not as titillating as the title — not to mention the phone sex-y voice mail piece on the gallery line — may imply. Though there is some erotic content here, guest curator Marcia Tanner taps into the promiscuity of sound in contemporary culture. She has grouped seven artists who incorporate and/or overlay ambient sound, sometimes brashly, into their work, as they would a visual element. Those included are not identified as "sound artists" — save for Ed Osborne, who contributes an audiophile-insider sculpture of two German fidelity test records. The show has more of the feel of what's commonly termed "media art." For example, Connie Walsh's video installation (with accompanying photos) includes a wall-mounted monitor with footage of a young woman chomping on a candy necklace and an overlay of a another twirling a hula hoop. The disembodied whooshing sounds of each activity

are insidiously mix together, to nebulous effect. More fun are Alison Ruttan's delightful videotapes of brightly colored, seemingly abstract biomorphic shapes, which, on closer inspection, are hard-core porn scenes turned into cartoons. Slip on the headphones, and you're immersed in a peppy collaged soundtrack composed of funky music from 1970s sex flicks or splashy wet sounds that come from god knows where. It seems a perfect prelude to Sheri Simons's elaborate padded cell installation, which has many places to put your ear to the wall to hear stray sounds from BBC news broadcasts. The most satisfying piece here is Nina Katchadourian's series of wall-mounted transparent balls, each containing a wad of cassette tape, which the artist found on the streets of European cities (noted on a map fragment in each bubble). You can listen, via Walkman, to the unlikely sounds of these cities: cheesy Euro-pop, classical, Indian, and even a bit of Neil Young. Katchadourian capably visualizes the idea that manufactured sounds are carried across international boundaries by the wind. (A video installation by Adriana Arenas hadn't been installed at press time, but will be in view Thurs/7.) *Tues.-Fri., 10:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m.; Sat., 11 a.m.-5 p.m., 49 Geary, S.F. Free. (415) 399-1493.* (Glen Helfand)



THE EUROPEAN COLLECTION (SURFACE SPOILS), BY NINA KATCHADOURIAN