



Kerry Scharlin: Installation view of *Wanted*, 1991-93, black-and-white-photographs, 78 by 49½ inches each; at Postmasters.

Kerri Scharlin at Postmasters

Kerri Scharlin's conceptual installation in the project room at Postmasters involved issues of representation and identity.

Seventeen large photographs, all enlargements of drawings of a face, were pinned to the gallery walls. According to a posted note, all of the images represent the artist. This is surprising since no two of the faces look alike.

Over the past two years, Scharlin asked 17 acquaintances to contact the police department and help three police-sketch artists, Steve Mancusi, Bob Philios and Frank Domingo (who had never met her), produce a composite sketch of her. In the wildly divergent pencil-on-paper sketches, such factors as age, hair color, facial type and race vary from picture to picture. Sometimes even the gender is not clear.

The project, which in many ways resembles a 1971 John Baldessari piece called *Police Drawing*, may be seen as simply a narcissistic exercise; in fact, the relationship between narcissism and creativity is a central theme in all Scharlin's works. But other provocative ideas are touched upon in this piece. Beyond questioning the accuracy of composite sketches used for Most Wanted signs tacked up in post offices, the show underscores the difficulty of communication and the tentativeness of human perception.

While grappling with these issues, however, Scharlin has run into some serious problems. One wonders if she compromised the project by going for a certain theatricality in the presentation. Blowing up the original 17-by-11-inch sketches into photographs more than 6 feet tall gave the installation a physical impact that the original drawings would have lacked. But bringing photography into play seems to open up a whole new can of worms; photographic distortion of the drawings confuses Scharlin's questioning of the reliability of communication. The piece might have been more focused had only the original drawings been on display, as was the case in a previous show where Scharlin, having posed as an art school model for a time, exhibited students' sketches of herself. The newer work, building upon the earlier experiment, is more ambitious. Its success or failure, however, may only be relative to further development of Scharlin's ideas.

—David Ebony