

ARTWEEK

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EXHIBITIONS

NOT "FOR EYES ONLY"

Cupertino / Sylvie Roder

Bodies certainly get picked over in art exhibits, but the face is another matter. The idea of faces as the subject of a show is such a natural that it's a wonder no one around these parts has focused on it before. Leave it to Jan Rindfleisch, director of Helen Euphrat Gallery at De Anza College, to come up with something special. She has taken a basic theme and treated it in complex ways.

Rindfleisch is an independent-minded curator whose projects carry a strong personal stamp, in concept as well as in execution. One of them, *Staying Visible*, dealt with the role of archives or "saved stuff" in rescuing artists from oblivion. In that exhibit, entropy was the villain, and there was no doubt as to who was at the helm of the show, putting up resistance. But Rindfleisch made no claim to ascertain talent or pass judgment on what deserved preservation for posterity.

Faces ignores the same matters. Rindfleisch is oriented toward issues rather than images, and this show is more organized around human priorities than around esthetic ones. In her view, theme shows are elitist events bound by conventional rules. She prefers the term "forum show" and has turned the gallery into an arena, staging confrontations instead of merely installing pieces in passive proximity to each other. There is quirkiness in this game, but its zest and speculative

spirit are contagious.

In fleshing out her purpose, Rindfleisch covers nearly all bases, hits some home runs and occasionally strikes out. Many of her juxtapositions work well. Robert Arneson's self-portrait sticks out its rude tongue at one of Chuck Close's haughty head trips, at the same time mingling compatibly with an earthy, "non-mainstream" wood carving by John Abduljaami. The fixity of Beverly Mayeri's clay busts is oddly matched with a masklike replica of the Venus de Milo's forgotten face. It's also fascinating to compare a young child's developing code for capturing human features with the computer code already developed by Susan Brennan for Atari's Caricature Generator, and to find that both rely on reduction and exaggeration. Rejoice! The human brain is still the best computer.

Photography shines in this assembly, with portraits of "radical elders" from what promises to be a fine series by Richard Bermack and with Leo Holub's study of Imogen Cunningham (herself a radical elder to contend with). Also outstanding are Katherine Lincoln Bradner's unblinking, compassionate etchings of people nearing life's end and Barbara Johnson's treatment of Virginia Woolf and Gertrude Stein as if they were her contemporaries—Stein looking less like a dreadnought than usual and Woolf as haunted as ever. Another inspired moment is the chance encounter with yourself in the full-length mirror discreetly hung in a corner of the gallery.

Some of the show's other display experiments are less wise. To hang a small pastel at knee level among larger and stronger works in the name of "associative grouping" is to hang it badly. But though an occasional eccentricity may serve as salt and pepper to the feast—and the installation has an undeniable festive appeal—there are decisions in *Faces* that are more bothersome.

The problem with a forum is that some voices carry better than others. Though they may speak with equal urgency, it does not follow that they all speak with matched articulateness. The show is simultaneously a call to community involvement through art and an invitation to confront art itself. What an antithesis! The nagging question of fluency in the language of art interferes with the social issues being addressed. The essays col-



Carina Ryan, *Lucile & David Packard*, oil painting, 41" x 56", at Helen Euphrat Gallery, De Anza College, Cupertino. ©1982 Carina Ryan. Photo: X. de Gery.

lected for the exhibit's companion book also lack a unifying standard: cogent arguments, such as the text prepared by the Atari computer expert, don't necessarily have more to say than the clumsily written ones, but they are more effective in their expression.

The fantasy and intuition evident in *Faces* are marred by such disparities. The show is an attempt at cross-cultural synthesis and must be judged on its own terms, which are manipulative and even

opinionated. In pursuing her own interior monolog, the curator tends to overwhelm her material. This does not always serve the dialog she wishes to stimulate.

On the other hand, it's refreshing to find a show with original, thought-provoking insights. Rindfleisch is characteristically willing to take a position and considerable risks. *Faces* is, at the very least, a vigorous consciousness raiser that stands apart from the pack. I find myself returning to the Euphrat Gallery for just those reasons. □



John Abduljaami, *Self-Portrait*, 1983, wood, at Helen Euphrat Gallery, De Anza College, Cupertino.



Judy North, *Bobby with Mask*, 1976, watercolor on canvas, at Helen Euphrat Gallery, De Anza College, Cupertino. Photo: Joe Schopplein.