



Margaret Moulton

Curator Jan Rindfleisch contemplates some of the faces that comprise her *Faces* exhibit at DeAnza's Euphrat Gallery.

## Scientist discovers faces of art

by Sylrie Roder

Once upon a time there was a Purdue University science major who "wanted to get through as fast as possible, wanted only math and physics", wanted to be by herself, and took humanities courses only if she had to.

She got all her wishes. And then she became an art gallery director.

A likely story!

This tale of upward or at least sidewise mobility belongs to Jan Rindfleisch, director of De Anza College's Helen Euphrat Gallery for the past five years, and now a newly-settled Palo Alto resident.

Rindfleisch said she stayed away from art for years because as a child she was told she "didn't draw good horses." Childhood memories shape her teaching and curating philosophy to this day: "I don't teach my students given truth, I give them something to bounce off," she said. "People always tell you that talent is inborn, but I don't believe in all that. You can always learn, grow and change."

In her first job at Pasadena's Jet Propulsion Lab, Rindfleisch found herself surrounded by "four white walls" and realized she didn't have much else to share with her scientific colleagues. Burning whatever high-octane fuel propels her, she did a complete turnaround, took up new studies in art at San Jose State, and soon began teaching art history at De Anza before becoming head of its campus gallery.

Rindfleisch still displays some of the at-

tributes of the good experimental physicist. She approaches art in a skeptical, restless spirit that tests every theory, challenges every established art world axiom, and takes nothing for granted. Discussing art, her hands gesture quotes in the air around words like "good" or "bad" while her voice signals a big question mark.

"A gallery can be more than we expect" Rindfleisch said. "There is staleness if expectations are never questioned." She wants to bring "some of the excitement in the shows at the Exploratorium" (The San Francisco visual display and demonstration hall) to her own gallery projects.

She wonders what alienates non-gallery goers, asks in her essays if you have "seen yourself in art lately," and fervently believes the answer should be yes.

"One of my biggest blows was to find there were no women in art history. No women! I began to wonder who else was left out," Rindfleisch said.

As a result of her social concerns, her shows often place human priorities before aesthetic ones. A recent exhibition, *Staying Visible*, examined the role of research and documents in shaping the fame or oblivion of eleven California women artists.

Her current exhibit, called *Faces*, again carries her distinctive hallmarks: famous signatures mingle with obscure ones, children's drawings sit by computer-generated graphics, and slick realism rubs shoulders with untutored expression. No

one gets left out. There is even a mirror so that you too can be in the picture.

This pluralism has been known to put critics in a snit, but Rindfleisch is undaunted. To those who find her intentions unclear or her choices irreconcilable, she replies: "I don't want to give special messages in my shows." She feels that there is "mystification" in the generally accepted criteria that rule the art world. With formal training, she said, "you have all these answers" that fit art theory or convention

plans or upcoming shows. But with her interdisciplinary background and eclectic tastes, she may well return to the themes of inter-action between technology and art which have interested her in the past. She is well aware of the growing numbers of technologically oriented potential viewers in and around Silicon Valley, and feels strongly that the community needs to grow artistically.

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but don't seem to fit the questions that arise in the real world.

Rindfleisch does not have much time for her own art work these days. But she once figured in a show where women traced their creative link from grandmother to mother to self. While many of the artists in that show seemed to find their link by rummaging in the attic, Rindfleisch's treatment of the theme was blunt and to the point. It also involved faces, with a terse caption under each. To quote two of them: "She saw many sides to every question, discussed, explained . . . and infinitum" (her mother), and "I have to do *this* now" (herself).

Rindfleisch is reticent concerning future

some of the other cities in the area," she said.

What is certain is that she will continue to stage what she calls "forums," to stimulate debate and challenge fundamental concepts, rather than hand classic shows of art for art's sake. Observers may or may not agree with her views, but must grant her a strong social commitment and the strength of her convictions.

"Art influences us so much. There is a need to take visual responsibility for the way images serve power plays."

*The Faces exhibit runs at De Anza College's Euphrat Gallery through April 27.*

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