

Eileen Starr Moderbacher

Reviews

## San Francisco Art Gallery Openings Reviews 2010

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ArtZone 461 Gallery: Eileen Starr Moderbacher - New Small Paintings; UN-TITLED - Group Show.

Review and images by GETBIZI: Intimate, is the word I would use to describe Eileen Starr Moderbacher's show "New Small Paintings." Entering the Side Gallery, the first thing I notice are images of cacti on the wall opposite the door. And because the paintings are 8"x6" in size, I am compelled to walk across the room to view each piece. Beyond the visually uncomfortable prickliness of the cacti, I am drawn in by the tiny colorful manmade article in each painting... a pink handbag in one, a two headed doll in the next (one in a yellow and the other in a sky blue dress), and a couple of toy ducks in another. Are these captured moments of painful childhood memories?

I have a brief discussion with the artist, Eileen Starr Moderbacher, and she tells me the cacti do represent some challenging recent experiences she endured. The articles in each painting do come from childhood memories and a few from not-so-long-ago memories, but the interpretation is best left up to the viewers as they will draw on their own life experiences to give the art personal and intimate meaning.

A group show of gallery artists, "UN-TITLED" runs concurrently in the main gallery.

Review by RWM: Nice group show of the artists we have been seeing at ArtZone 461 since their inception. One will find an impressive collection of art in a variety of mediums selected from the artworks of their regulars. A sculpture of a pointing hand announce that one has found the spot. There are also portraits, abstractions, landscapes, and sculpture.

Of special note is the new exhibit of Eileen Starr Moderbacher-- small paintings of the desert flora. Among the cactus, if one looks closely, one will discover the human artifacts left behind. One need be aware of the needles and of nature in general. We as viewers and artists have been there.



Eileen Starr Moderbacher art (image c/o AB).



Eileen Starr Moderbacher.



Cap & cactus art by Eileen Starr Moderbacher (image c/o AB).

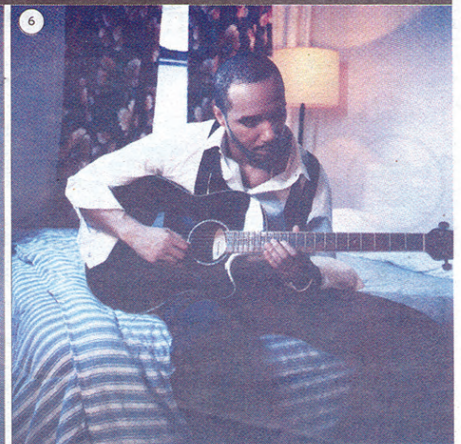


Detail of yellow pumpkins in cactus art by Eileen Starr Moderbacher.



# GUARDIAN

THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY GUARDIAN PICKS



JAN. 30-  
FEB. 5, 2008  
**ZZ TOP**

By Johnny Ray Huston  
johnny@sfbg.com

The loaded title of Douglas Gordon and Philippe Parreno's extraordinary film, *Zidane: A 21st Century Portrait*, promises a rendering of the iconic footballer and of the century in which he (and we) resides. It more than delivers on that pledge. This week in the *Guardian's* Noise blog I'll salute Kevin Shields, who makes a key contribution to *Zidane's* soundtrack. And in the Pixel Vision blog, I'll write more about *Zidane* and continue to post videos and words connected to our recent "Video-Mutants" issue.

Feb. 1-7, 7:30 p.m. (also Fri/1-Sat/2, 9:30 p.m.; Sun/3, 5 p.m.) \$8-\$10  
Yerba Buena Center for the Arts screening room  
701 Mission, SF  
(415) 978-2787  
www.ybca.org

**WEDNESDAY**  
JAN. 30

**MUSIC**

**Isabellas**  
Drummer Dave Bartels is all grown up — or that's how it seems when you compare Oakland's Isabellas to his previous band, the Sweet Nothings. Just months ago he was tripping over sweaty bodies at Oakland house parties while singing for the sloppy, ultrafast punk act, but he now focuses on Isabellas, a female-fronted midtempo rock band reminiscent of Pretty Girls Make Graves. It contributes a much-needed uniqueness to the East Bay punk scene, whereas the Sweet Nothings only embellished the overrepresented pop-punk style. For the house show averse, don't worry: Isabellas thrive on a stage, where there's little to no risk of interacting with other people's sweat or spilled beer. **(Alex Felsing)**

With Blank Slaters, Cupids, and Passionistas  
9 p.m., \$5

Knockout  
3223 Mission, SF  
(415) 550-6994  
www.theknockoutsf.com

**THURSDAY**  
JAN. 31

**MUSIC**

**James Ehnes**  
I'm a sucker for a hot fiddler — and gonzo for good-looking violin virtuosos — so imagine my glee on learning that Grammy-nominated, Juno-winning, 31-year-old Canadian classical cutie James Ehnes will be slinging his strings during a weekend engagement with the San Francisco Symphony. The program, conducted by the legendary Vladimir Ashkenazy, includes Ottorino Respighi's lush 1916 classic, *Fountains of Rome*, contemporary whiz Einojuhani Rautavaara's architecturally ravishing *Manhattan Trilogy*, and Max Bruch's breezy, prancing-o'er-the-moors *Scottish Fantasy* — plus a shot of Suite No. 2 from Albert Roussel's dreamy Parisian mainstay from 1930, *Bacchus et Ariane*. It's a romantic trip

around the world, with plenty of plucking involved. **(Marke B.)**

With the San Francisco Symphony  
2 p.m., \$25-\$125  
Also Fri/1-Sat/2, 8 p.m.  
Davies Symphony Hall  
201 Van Ness, SF  
(415) 864-6000  
www.sfsymphony.org

**VISUAL ART**

**"Narratives"**  
Of the four sculptors included in this exhibit, Oakland ceramist Susannah Israel's work stands out for its unique form, muted colors, and bleak depiction of reality. Inspired by drawings in a children's book, *Ballet Class* depicts young rabbits learning a new pose. Although cute in concept, the sculptures of the teacher and pupils have a grim feeling similar to that of the Claymation in *The Nightmare before Christmas* or even of the evil rabbit in *Donnie Darko*. Other art on display will include Berkeley resident Nina Lyons's clay works, Andrew Myers's bronze collection, and Matthew

Zupnick's pieces, which combine bronze, steel, and wood. **(Felsing)**

Through April 5  
Opening reception 5:30 p.m.  
Free  
Sculpturesite Gallery  
201 Third St., suite 102, SF  
(707) 933-1300  
www.sculpturesitegallery.com

**FRIDAY**  
FEB. 1

**MUSIC**

**Lesbian**  
I've never been able to parse the word *psychedelic* as it's applied to music. Mostly it conjures up Jon Stewart's cameo in *Half Baked*, suggesting none too subtly that the tunes in question are much better heard while you're "on weed." Luckily, bands like Seattle's Lesbian work hard to give the term a good name, conjuring forth huge gusts of guitar, spindly, wind-chimey licks, and twisted chord changes — all in the service of a musical assault that will definitely do something to your mind,

whether that means a bending, an expansion, or simply a good old-fashioned blowing. **(Ben Richardson)**

**VISUAL ART**

**"Danger Girl"**  
Eileen Starr Moderbacher's paintings gleam like cels from a Japanese anime film. Catsuited superheroes slink up beside shackled lunatics as old tires rot near gnarled trees, leaving you unsure whether the actors are the stars of the bleak, soft-focused world around them or just casualties. Welding realism with a pulp aesthetic, Moderbacher challenges viewers "to reconsider what aspects of life are real," posing the question with unsettling scenes from an R-rated cartoon that are a feast for the narrative imagination as well as the eye. **(Dina Maccabee)**

Through March 8  
Opening reception 6-9 p.m.  
Free  
Mission 17  
2111 Mission, suite 401, SF  
(510) 467-4818  
www.mission17.org



# Shotgun Review

*Anti/Social* at Mission 17

by Sarah Lockhart

From the curatorial statement: "Social interaction has become an integral part of contemporary art practice. ... In this show we hope to raise questions concerning the social dynamics in artwork and call new attention to the antisocial as both a defining feature of modern life, and a locus for social change."

When I read this statement in the prospectus for Mission 17's juried exhibition, "Anti/Social," I was exceptionally curious to see the resulting show - especially after having taken note of several recent exhibitions of "relational aesthetics" art - current exhibitions at the Wattis Institute and the multifold "Offsite" series at Southern Exposure, which includes the private public space interventions of ReBar and the Radio Cartography project of Neighborhood Public Radio, which wins the prize for deftly combining the art trends of relational aesthetics and mapping. After seeing the Phil Collins compendium of Turkish youth performing karaoke to songs by the Smiths, *Dünya Dinlemiyor* (Turkish for "the world won't listen," the British version of the album released in America as "Louder Than Bombs") at SF MoMA, then attending The Lab's presentation of "You Don't Love Me Yet," Swedish artist Johanna Billings' screening and performance event of local musicians covering the titular Rocky Erickson song, I was betting with myself whether the Mission 17 show would have a musical component.

I have never been one to deny the art status of work displayed as such, and the social practices genre has promises of interestingness, though often these promises are broken by poor presentation and a significant chasm between the stated intent and goals and the results of the executed project.

I was really impressed by the Mission 17 show in the overall strength of the works on display and the breadth of solid approaches to the theme. Several works addressed the curators' unease with the common tropes of relational aesthetics directly through work in that genre.

Paul Zografakis' "Waiting for a Sign" was an example of a well thought out idea that succeeded in execution and was presented well in the gallery. The photo documentation depicting the artist holding several of the signs written for him by passersby in Union Square first catch the eye. The video - documenting Zografakis shouting through a megaphone and holding signs with the accompanying slogans also show the series of sign makers approaching the table the artist had set up, and the artist switching from being a one man rally to "Free Palestine!" to declaiming "I love you I love you I love you I love you." The signs, themselves, are also on display - one taped over another - which was a good choice as the lighting of the video makes them illegible at times.

I appreciated Zografakis' project in that it confronts the limited ability art has to effect political change in America with a sense of humor and self-awareness, rather than a fey earnestness about the radical potential of "random acts of kindness" and quirky beautification initiatives.

Kathrine Worel's "Exchanging Room" had me clenching my teeth and steeling myself in anticipation of some variant of touchy-feely take-your-shoes-off-and-hang-out-in-a-tent art. Instead, I found myself in a neutral office waiting room environment filling out a survey about why I attend art openings, what I thought of relational art, and what I thought was the role of the artist in society. A dialog between Worel and another artist in the show played at conversational volume on speakers placed on the floor. As I got to the role of the artist question on the survey, writing about how I distrust universal pronouncements about the role of the artist in society, I noticed that the discussion was exploring that exact sentiment. I listened further to artist, Jesse Houlding discussing his prints of plastic shopping bags and the complex relationship we have to them and critiquing their portrayal as "Gee whiz isn't life beautiful" symbols in the film "American Beauty," which returned my thoughts to how that aestheticization of the banal seems so prevalent in relational art. I found the recorded conversation consistently interesting and intelligent and appreciated the fact that it was edited. Another thing that keeps some social practices art from succeeding in my eyes is a lack of editing - whether visual (in terms of displaying a project in a compelling manner) or temporal (how long does one expect a visitor or participant to engage with this).

There were also a number of strong works that engaged the "anti/social" theme in traditional media, including Houlding's prints of the omnipresent shopping bags, a subject the artist eloquently describes in his statement as "dancing trash that we ignore or aestheticize." Moshe Quinn's silver gel prints of the angles formed by corporate office buildings illustrate the theme quite well - the sense of aggressive interiority of these towers is depicted in their sheer facades, reflecting glass, and high modern grids. Also of note is Eileen Starr Moderbacher's painting of an unpopulated residential street with a tidy home with a topiary "Joy" on the front lawn juxtaposed with a pile of litter on the opposite corner, a sight I've seen quite often in neighborhoods developers and city planners call "transitional." Alan Bamberger documented the show's opening on his site [artbusiness.com](http://artbusiness.com), effusively praising Edmund Wyss' hyper-realistic paintings of a bullet and camera lens. These oil paintings are indeed gorgeous, though didactic. In an exhibition with so many other works that are both immediately engaging and nuanced, I would disagree with Bamberger's assessment Wyss' paintings are the best things in the show.

"Anti/Social" will be on view at Mission17 through January 6th. The gallery will be closed from December 23rd through January 1st. For more information visit: <http://www.mission17.org/>

from the Shotgun Review - posted December 16, 2006 03:15 PM





## MISSION 17's third annual juried exhibition.

Featuring Work by: Victor Barbieri, Deer Fang, Peter Foucault, Justin Hoover and Patricia Maloney, Jesse Houlding, Bradley Hyppa, Eileen Starr Moderbacher, Moshe Quinn, Kathrine Worel, Edmund Wyss, and Paul Zografakis

December 1st, 2006 - January 7th, 2007

Opening Reception: December 1st, 2006, 6 - 9pm

Juried by Clark Buckner, Cheryl Meeker, Elaine Santos, and Michael Zheng

Image by Eileen Starr Moderbacher, 'Joy'

Social interaction has become an integral part of contemporary art practice. In recent years, these "relational aesthetics" have been celebrated in several major Bay Area exhibitions, and connected specifically with the nexus between art and social activism, which gave rise in the 60s and 70s to the leading, local "alternative spaces."

But are these social experiments necessarily progressive? Do they in fact present serious challenges to the status quo? Or has their assimilation to the museum and art history, to the contrary, rendered them implicitly conservative? Do "relational aesthetics" challenge the over valorization of art as an idealized realm set apart from everyday life? Or do they aestheticize social action and, in the process, neutralize its political force? Do social experiments in art articulate alternative model of social life, or do they present ideological fantasies of social harmony in a world where war and exploitation are constants? If social life has become a museum piece, is it not perhaps over?

And what has become of the misanthropic artist, who embodies social conflict in her alienation? What has become of the critical force of the autonomous work of art in its distinction from the world around it?

In this show we hope to raise questions concerning the social dynamics in artwork and call new attention to the antisocial as both a defining feature of modern life, and a locus for social change.

# Marius Starkey



Squat and Gobble 3  
3600 16th Street, SF  
Open everyday: 8am-11pm



*For Immediate Release – May 1st, 2006*

## **Arts on Fire X opens at the Pacifica Center for the Arts**

**Pacifica, CA** – Arts on Fire X, the Sanchez Art Center's tenth annual exhibition, was inaugurated April 28th 2006. The show, which includes the work of 48 artists, was juried by Larry Rinder, dean of graduate studies at the California College for the Arts and adjunct curator at the Whitney Museum in New York. The exhibition runs through June 3rd at the Pacifica Center for the Arts, 1220-B Linda Mar Boulevard, Pacifica, CA 94044.

To highlight outstanding works in the exhibition, the Juror awards two participating artists a solo show in the following year's installment of the Arts on Fire exhibition. Last year's award winners were Mark Jurasin and Jane Woolverton, whose work is currently on view in the art center's East Wing Galleries. The 2007 exhibition award winners were artists Haakon Faste and Eileen Starr Moderbacher, with honorable mentions awarded to Steven Elliot and Mary Gould.

Faste's piece, *Untitled (Wings)*, is a 12' wingspan mechanical installation which forms a centerpiece for the exhibition. Suspended from an overhead mechanism and driven by an electric motor attached to an assembly of cables and pulleys, the piece moves slowly in a graceful, symmetrical motion at the center of the gallery space, triggered by the motion of viewers entering the room.



**Untitled (Wings)** by Haakon Faste. Steel and paper with electric motor, 2001

Recent work by Faste includes a major public commission for the City of Mountain View, inaugurated last fall, and recent installations at the Biennale della Toscana in Florence, Italy, and the XI Biennial of Young Artists from Europe and the Mediterranean in Athens, Greece.

Eileen Starr Moderbacher's small oil paintings, titled "Situation Atrophy" and "Joy", are of a much more intimate and psychological nature. "The scenes I choose to portray are an echo of my own dramatic, cynical perspective and are very theatrical, almost film-like," she writes. "Each one of the paintings probes themes such as the breakdown of our safety net, senseless deaths and the persistent banal details of a modern life." Her work was recently featured in the CCA's MFA exhibition, in addition to "Spark," a show of culture to benefit the arts on KQED.

Arts on Fire X will be on view through June 3, 2006.



**Joy and Situation Atrophy** by Eileen Starr Moderbacher. Oil on canvas, 2005

### **Arts on Fire X**

Tenth Annual Juried Exhibition

April 28 – June 3, 2006

Sanchez Art Center

Pacifica Center for the Arts

1220-B Linda Mar Boulevard

Pacifica, CA 94044

Gallery hours Friday, Saturday & Sunday from 1-5 pm

Information (650) 355-1894 or [www.sanchezartcenter.org](http://www.sanchezartcenter.org)



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what:	<input type="text" value="All Art"/>	when:	<input type="text" value="All Dates"/>
where:	<input type="text" value="San Francisco"/>	keyword:	<input type="text" value="Mission 17"/> <input type="button" value="Go"/>

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## Truth and Lies

Mission 17  
The Blue Studio  
2111 Mission St.  
San Francisco, CA  
415.336.2349

The new year seems like a fine time to come clean, and Mission 17's "Truth and Lies" thoughtful group show suggests some worthwhile place to start. Dustin Fosnot's "Styrofoountain" could be the centerpiece of any post-consumer Zen garden — it's a hunk of Styrofoam plugged into an air current, so that the crumbled white particles appear to be bubbling. What eventually bubbles up from this mesmerizing faux fountain is a terrible landfill truism: Soon, this may pass for natural beauty.

The same might be said for Ben Riesman's clever "Ornithology", a small wood-paneled speaker playing what sounds like the collected squawks of an entire rain forest of birds. But sounds, too, can be deceptive: All the bird calls heard here are actually noises made by the artist himself.

"My Memory of George Bush (as described to, and drawn by, Sergeant A. Morales)" is and is not a portrait of the current U.S. president by conceptual artist Liz Rossof. Rossof initiated this portrait by describing Bush's distinguishing features to a police sketch artist as a crime victim would. But the surprise result is that Bush looks less like a war criminal or any other kind than Howdy Doody, complete with the puppet's freckles, feckless wooden grin and wide, shining eyes. In contrast, Rossof's dictated portrait of Dick Cheney resembles a convicted felon who took up violin in the joint, with brooding, bushy eyebrows and a ticklish fuzz of ear hair. This could be a sympathetic portrait of any old grifter who's lost his edge, but for the telltale lemur-esque expression of a guy who's spent a little too long in an underground bunker.

But the toughest true/false test is Charles Beronio's "Black Beige (integrated)": folding chairs neatly stacked to form a makeshift black and tan rainbow. This isn't exactly the perfectly integrated "Black and Tan Fantasy" of Duke Ellington, or the powerful rainbow coalition Jessie Jackson had in mind, either: The beige chairs still overwhelm the black ones here, and the arch is too unstable to bridge any weighty differences. Whether this structure passes or fails at representing integration as we know it is not a question of Beronio's provocative sculpture, but of society itself.—

—Alison Bing, special to SF Gate

# A&E Big calendar

Times critics' best bets for Dec. 19-Jan. 15

## 26 SUNDAY

### COMEDY

It's a big, fat send-off to 2004 in the Big Fat Year: End Kiss Of Comedy Show. Local favorite Will Duran and some of his friends team up every year at this time for an all-out comedy show. This year's first stop is in Pleasanton. Other venues include Owen Levine Regional Center for the Arts Dec. 30 and Cowell Theater in San Francisco on Dec. 31. 7 p.m., Abrador Theater, 1155 Santa Rita Road, Pleasanton, 919-824-0252/37-2444, www.cowelltheater.com



## 29 WEDNESDAY

### CONCERT

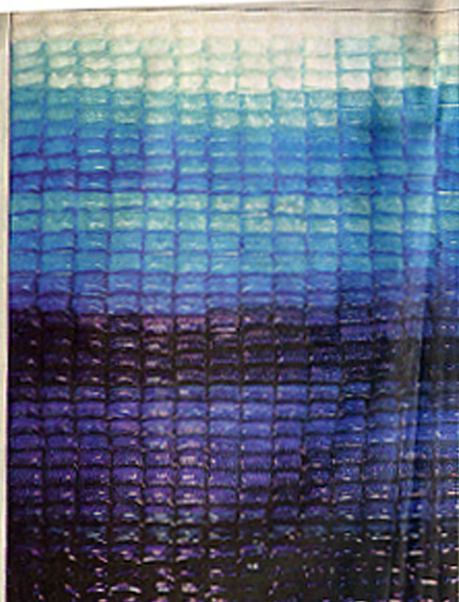
Day Area singer-songwriter Verónica Treviño (pictured) topses the top guitar on her latest CD, "Warm Strangers," to generate the same tenderness from critics and fans that was generated by her first album, "Missing You." She brings her alt-rock mix of folk, pop and world music to the Margaret S. Greiving Center, 1111 Anderson Ct., 7 p.m., 910-641-1111, www.jhrc.org



## 5 WEDNESDAY

### TV

There's good news for all of you viewers suffering from "Alicia" withdrawal (sorry, Jennifer Garner's *Survive to Thrive* premiered a few days back to kick backstage that as the city drama's fourth season launches with a special two-hour airing, NBC's moving "Alicia" from its longtime Sunday-night slot (previously over by *Chicago Hope*) to Wednesday's 8 p.m. slot. The presence of Angela Russell, who joins the show as a CIA agent, 8 p.m., Channels 7 and 15.



## 9 SUNDAY

### COMEDY

Let's say you found \$20 Zippo lighters for a ridiculously low price. What if you pack some into a truck for the rest of your life or life them with vicious phobias of dried water and create a work of art (pictured) the way Christine La Scola did? Her artwork, "Smoking Machine," is part of a group show on view through today at the ... the Acorn gallery, 3 p.m., www.acornart.com

## 9 SUNDAY

### EXHIBIT

Ten artists who claim they "just can't leave well enough alone" are part of a group show titled "Commotion" opening today at the Hollis Street Project in Emeryville. Eileen Star Mosenbacher's "My World Turned 90 Degrees," a 6-by-6-inch oil painting (pictured), is among the works. Exhibit space open 8 a.m.-6 p.m. Mondays-Fridays Jan. 10-Feb. 25, 5900 Hollis St., Emeryville, 415-512-7904.



The Contra Costa Times, Sunday, December 19, 2004



# FIRST AMENDMENT PROJECT

1736 Franklin St., 9th Floor, Oakland, CA 94612 ☐ phone: 510.208.7744 ☐ fax: 510.208.4562 ☐ www.thefirstamendment.org  
David Greene  
Executive Director/Staff Counsel

James Wheaton  
Senior Counsel

Regina O'Connell  
Chair, Mill Valley Art Commission  
Mill Valley City Hall  
P.O. Box 1029  
Mill Valley, CA 94942  
fax: 415-381-1736

Ms. O'Connell:

The First Amendment Project, the National Coalition Against Censorship and the ACLU of Northern California are nonprofit organizations dedicated to promoting the First Amendment right to freedom of speech, including the freedom of artistic expression. We write to express our deep concern with the removal of Eileen Starr Moderbacher's paintings from her installation at the Mill Valley Community Center, and also with the Commission's guidelines for the display of art at the center. We strongly urge you to reconsider the guidelines and your limitations for displaying art at the Community Center.

It is our understanding that several of Ms. Moderbacher's paintings were removed from the exhibit after the city received some complaints that the works were not appropriate for children who used the community center. Ms. Moderbacher rehung the works but left them covered and marked "censored." The works remained in that condition until they were removed at the end of the exhibition.

We further understand that the basis for the removal of the works was the City's guidelines for hanging artworks in city buildings. These guidelines purport to limit art displayed in city buildings to that which will "ensure that City buildings are places where citizens, employees, and visitors of various ages and diverse views feel welcome and comfortable."

Based on these facts, it is clear to us, from a legal perspective, that the City's guidelines, as well as the removal of Ms. Moderbacher's paintings based upon those guidelines, are unconstitutional. As the guidelines acknowledge, the public buildings in which art is displayed are limited public forums. As such, the City is able to place content limitations on works which may be displayed there. However, any such limitations must be set out as objective criteria in advance. Hopper v. City of Pasco, 241 F.3d 1067, 1080 (9th Cir. 2001) (holding that a similar policy of excluding "controversial" art was hopelessly subjective and could not withstand constitutional scrutiny). The criteria must be specific enough so that both artists and the art commission are adequately guided in their decision-making. Without such clear guidelines, both the artists and the curators will be chilled in their artistic expression, excluding important work for fear of making a potential viewer uncomfortable.

From a policy perspective, you must surely realize how unworkable the "welcoming and comfortable" standard is with respect to the display of art. The range of artistic expression that is potentially "unwelcoming" and "discomforting" to diverse audiences is boundless. Indeed, in welcoming visitors with "diverse views," the City is necessarily welcoming a group of visitors who will not all share the same opinion about the art they see displayed. Inevitably some will like a given exhibit, finding it powerful or moving, while others may find it disturbing. Moreover, the unstated requirement that the artwork be suitable for young children is equally unworkable and subject to tremendous variation based on personal predilections. If applied in a truly consistent manner, this condition would inevitably lead to the exclusion of almost all art.

Ironically, by removing the artwork, the Commission has created an atmosphere of censorship in the Community Center that will likely make the building less welcoming and comfortable to the citizenry than Ms. Moderbacher's paintings ever would have.

We urge you to reconsider these guidelines. If guidelines are necessary, they should provide the artists and the curators with a clear sense of what art is and is not appropriate in the Community Center. We further urge you to adopt procedures for addressing complaints as they are made so that future exhibitions will not be removed by way of heckler's veto.

We certainly understand the city and the Commission's challenge here. We do not want to discourage you from displaying art in public buildings. Such a practice is extremely valuable to both the audiences and the artists. However, the City and the Commission must set out and consistently implement objective criteria for the selection of work which may be displayed.

Very truly yours,

**FIRST AMENDMENT PROJECT**      **NATIONAL COALITION AGAINST CENSORSHIP**      **ACLU OF NORTHERN CALIFORNIA**

David A. Greene

Svetlana Mintcheva

Ann Brick

cc: Eileen Starr Moderbacher  
Mayor Anne B. Solem  
Don Hunter, City Manager

# LEAH

## GARCHIK

Another holiday miracle, this one from the East Bay: **Steve Finacom** reports, "I saw a bicyclist stop voluntarily at a stop sign. In Berkeley."

• • •

**Sam Hayes** of the DiPietro Todd Salon in downtown San Francisco had an appointment to go to the Hotel Palomar on Thursday to do the hair of **Queen Noor** of Jordan. When the appointment was canceled, Noor paid anyway, which is one way to tell a queen from a commoner. (A princess might have her personal assistant make an apology, but wouldn't fork over the cash.) The salon charges \$205 an hour for on-site services.

Painter **Eileen Starr Moderbacher** has placed flaps marked "Censored" over works that the Mill Valley Art Commission had asked her to remove from her "Road Trip" show at the Mill Valley Community Center. Moderbacher describes the paintings as rather pretty landscapes featuring dead bodies in the road, comments on the "universal condition," on "issues" of contemporary life. The artist was told that the commission had received complaints about the content being disturbing to parents and children who use the center.

Commission head **Regina O'Connell** said that although Moderbacher's slides had been examined before she was signed to the show, "it did not register with us that these were bodies. We wouldn't have gone there." Mill Valley regulations specify that art hung in public buildings should allow that "citizens, employees and visitors of various ages and diverse views feel welcome and comfortable."

Moderbacher says the flaps over the works have actually drawn more attention to them.

## Public eavesdropping

"I wasn't really raised with manners. My parents didn't want to stifle me as a person."

*Overheard on the UC Berkeley campus by A.M.*

in the show here for her exhaustion.

• • •

An East Bay private school looking for a third-grade teacher placed an ad on Craig's List, noting, "Salary commiserate with OUSD." (That's the Oakland Unified School District, and maybe "commiserate," a word that has to do with sharing sorrow, means it's a modest amount of well-gotten gains.)

• • •

**Richard Goldman** had Oslo on his mind Friday night at **Kay and Sandy Walker's** party Friday night. A few hours before, when it was Friday night in Norway, **Wangari Maathai** of Kenya had received the Nobel Peace Prize. Maathai had won a Goldman Environmental Prize in 1991, and had invited Goldman to the ceremony in Norway. His son, **Doug**, and grandson **Matthew** were there in his stead. Maathai's prize, for environmental work, was "the first peace prize that has nothing to do with armed conflict," said Goldman, looking for all the world (literally) like a proud relative.

P.S.: Stopped by Sunday afternoon for the weekly jam at the Dogpatch Saloon on Third Street, where drummer **Vince Lateano**



# PAGESEVEN

## News Quirks

**WHEN GREGORY D.** Powell, 20, appeared before Judge R. Patrick Hayman on charges of assaulting police and disorderly conduct at an Ocean City, Md., motel, Powell's attorney pointed out that a conviction or probation could end his client's career with the University of Maryland football team. "Son," Hayman told the defendant, "you are about to get an early Christmas present, because I know what effect a probation would have. And it is a gift, because you are guilty as sin. I'm going to find you not guilty."

**IN ORDER TO** deal with the constant stream of drunk and disorderly baseball fans attending Chicago's Wrigley Field, officials said they are considering establishing a makeshift courtroom outside the stadium. "It's only an idea at this point," police spokesperson David Bayless cautioned.

**RAPE SUSPECT ULRICK** White, 31, eluded California authorities for more than a year until his victim spotted him on the television reality show *Blind Date*. The 35-year-old woman said she heard a female contestant refer to the suspect by his nickname and recognized his Jamaican accent. She videotaped the rest of his appearance and brought the tape to Ventura police, who arrested White.

**A BRITISH TELEVISION** channel announced that it is seeking a terminally ill volunteer to donate her or his body so it can be filmed as it decomposes. The show is tentatively titled *Dust to Dust*. "It has to be completely above board," Kevin Lygo, director of publicly funded Channel 4, said. "There will be nothing salacious about it."

**ALLEN COLEMAN, 42**, died while crossing a street in Magna, Utah, after his artificial leg fell off, and a car struck him when he crawled back to try to pick up the limb.

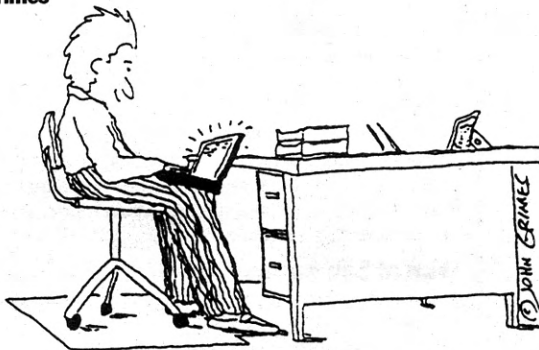
—Roland Sweet

## HERO

▲The slogan "think globally, act locally" embodies a worthwhile sentiment, but sometimes it pays to think *and* act on a global scale. That's been the *modus operandi* of Roots of Peace, a Marin-based

humanitarian organization dedicated to the worldwide eradication of land mines. For its latest action, the group has announced plans to restore ancient elephant migration routes in Africa currently riddled with mines, and has promised to follow up the effort with planting and restoration, just as they did with similar campaigns in Cambodia, Afghanistan, Croatia and Iraq. Recently, San Rafael resident and Roots founder Heidi Kuhn was joined by Nobel Peace laureates and land mine victims at a ceremony on the grounds of the United Nations in Kenya, where trees symbolizing the power of positive change were planted. In a troubled world, beacons of hope such as this shine all the brighter. Web site: [www.rootsofpeace.org](http://www.rootsofpeace.org).

Grimes



BOB LOVED HIS LAPTOP  
BUT FOUND HIS DESK  
OFTEN GOT IN THE WAY.

Schwadron



"OUR SON, WHO'S FORBIDDEN TO PLAY WITH GUNS, HAS JUST WIPED  
OUT CIVILIZATION WITH HIS SIMULATION GAME!"

▼When Eileen Moderbacher received word that her paintings had been chosen by the Mill Valley Arts Commission for exhibition at the community center, censorship was not at the front of her mind. That changed after a handful of complaints were lodged regarding a particular series of paintings and the works in question were promptly removed without warning. Moderbacher responded by re-hanging the paintings—which depicted fully clothed bodies lying in roads—with large coverings labeled "censored." Numerous patrons have since expressed indignation at this seemingly blatant case of censorship, calling for reinstatement of the entire series. Ironically, it would seem that the efforts of the offended complainants have served only to stir up increased attention for the exhibition and its artist. —Jacob Shafer

## ZERO



# MILL VALLEY HERALD

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DECEMBER 14-DECEMBER 20, 2004

## Artist raps Mill Valley for censorship



Artist Eileen Moderbacher's "My Friends" (above) was one of four pieces removed by the Mill Valley Art Commission last Monday after complaints about her exhibit "Cruisin' America," which officially opened at the Mill Valley Community Center on Dec. 7.

### Community center visitors offended by people in the road

JOSHUA SABATINI  
EDITOR

Berkeley artist Eileen Moderbacher says she's being censored right here in Mill Valley.

Moderbacher installed her exhibit — "Cruisin' America" — at the Mill Valley Community Center on Dec. 3, but by last Monday morning part of her exhibit was taken down.

Moderbacher was selected by the Mill Valley Art Commission as one of the featured artists on display in December. Just four days after going up, her exhibit was the target of complaints. Some claimed the work was not in keeping with the holiday spirit, others that it was too graphic

for children.

Dianne Simpson, Mill Valley art commissioner and exhibit curator, phoned Moderbacher last Monday informing her that part of her exhibit was inappropriate for the venue. "I said, 'What? Tomorrow is my opening. It will wreck my show.' I was in shock," Moderbacher told The Herald last week.

The main objection to the exhibit was paintings that depicted people lying on a road or along the roadside.

"We felt it was inappropriate for these paintings to be in the community center. It's a venue that is given to us. And we really appreciate it. It's just respecting the people who work there and the people who go there for other reasons. It's not a gallery per se. It's an opportunity for artists and we don't want to lose the opportunity," said Regina O'Connell, chair of the art commission.

Moderbacher said she submitted slides in April that showed the details of her exhibit and was baffled that now the commission was rejecting them. "This is censorship. This is not cool," she said. "[The Art Commission] should be backing me."

"Unfortunately, we did not see the depth or the content of some of the paintings and realize the reaction that might be given to that. We did see slides. She did send us slides and it was a juried show that went in. Had we really registered the depth and content we wouldn't have gone there. I'm sorry it's gone in this direction," said O'Connell.

The art commission hosts new shows each month at two city buildings: the Mill Valley Community Center and Mill Valley City Hall. The exhibits are launched the first Tuesday of each month in conjunction

See Art, Page 12

### Art

Continued from page 1

with the Mill Valley Art Walk. This event celebrates art openings in about 20 locations around the downtown area.

The pieces of Moderbacher's exhibit that sparked the controversy were "Road Trip," "Twilight," "On Your Everyday Ordinary Kind of Day" and "My Friends." Each of these works depicts a person or persons lying in the middle of the road, on the roadside or in an area around the road. "Road Trip" is an eight-panel work capturing time progression, from twilight to darkness. In each panel there is a truck that remains in the same position and in each panel bodies accumulate. "Twilight" has a "dialogue between a natural looking, brightly colored landscape and then one in twilight where a woman is lying on the road." About this painting, Moderbacher said, "I'm not saying the woman is dead. There's no blood, there's no guns, there's no violence."

In "Just an Ordinary Everyday Kind of Day" there's a woman lying along the roadside and in the distance appears a truck and a car. "My Friends" shows three figures apparently roughing up a person lying in the middle of the road.

Most of the pieces in the exhibit are small — about 6 inches by 8 inches — landscapes showing a highway or California fields at dusk. Many have beautiful foliage and an intense sunset sky. There is usually a road in the painting and often a truck driving away from the viewer. As is often the case with art, each panel is open to interpretation. The sub-

jects could be asleep or perhaps dead. The paintings could be a dream or a memory of a moment before the highway was built and opened up the land. In all, there is no blood and no gore.

"I paint urban subjects like fear, anxiety, danger and tension using the California landscape," Moderbacher. "We like to think it's safe in the country, but I often don't feel safe walking in secluded places. I am trying to show that anxiety has permeated all parts of our life."

Moderbacher, who has just completed her M.F.A. at California College of Art, was excited to have her first large public exhibition. She spent eight months preparing for the show.

She spent Monday and Tuesday on the phone with various commissioners to try and solve the dilemma. She did reach a compromise with the art commission for last Tuesday's opening: The commission allowed her to have the pieces sparking the controversy on display for the opening, but they had to come down the next day.

At the opening on Tuesday more than 30 people signed a petition, and left comments finding fault with the commissioner's decision to remove the artwork.

Moderbacher returned to the community center last Friday afternoon and in the spaces left empty by the removal of the artwork she placed signs that said in red letters "Censored," and then below, a message that said, "If you want to see these call me. If you want to read the comments of people in support of putting them back up they are over there at the concession stand."

As of late last week,

Simpson stood behind the decision to remove the pieces of art, referencing the guidelines that were established in the 1980s for art being hung in city buildings.

The city's guidelines read, "The selection of art for display in public buildings must be based on artistic merit, rather than the content of the artistic message being conveyed. ... City buildings are primarily places of employment and where public business is conducted, and secondarily serve as a limited public forum for the display of art. Although the city encourages artistic expression, the city also wishes to ensure that city buildings are places where citizens, employees and visitors of various ages and diverse views feel welcome and comfortable."

"To ensure compliance with the guidelines, the artist will work with the Art Commission to decide on the exact pieces and number to be shown at the gallery and to review the work after hanging."

Said Simpson, "We make it known that the [commission's] two shows are in city buildings and there are some limitations. The upside is that for local artists it's usually the first show they've ever done. They are getting exposure and it launches them on to other opportunities. The downside is the limitations in those two locations. When someone has been selected and has that opportunity they should understand the limitations of those two locations."

She added, "If you put [Moderbacher's] show in a gallery location it would work perfectly."

Sherry Miller contributed to this article. Miller is an artist and writer living in Mill Valley.





Special to the IJ/Nina Zhitto

**CONTROVERSY:** After the Mill Valley Arts Commission fielded complaints about paintings at Eileen Starr Moderbacher's exhibit at the Mill Valley Community Center, the artist took them down, then returned the work to the walls. But she covered them with signs declaring them 'censored.'

## Disputed paintings in Mill Valley removed

### At community center, Berkeley artist's work depicts apparent dead bodies

By Tad Whitaker  
*IJ reporter*

A Berkeley artist removed her controversial paintings from the Mill Valley Community Center yesterday ending a censorship dispute with the Mill Valley Art Commission

over roadside scenes featuring a fight and what appear to be dead bodies.

Eileen Starr Moderbacher installed "Cruisin' America" earlier this month, only to have commissioners take down several paintings because of public complaints. Moderbacher,

however, put the artwork back up in its original place and covered the images with white flip-up cardboard with the word "CENSORED."

"You see way more stuff on television and in newspapers," she said.

Commission chairwoman Regina O'Connell, who owns the downtown gallery Barefoot, said the commission doesn't

have a problem with the work. But nobody realized exactly what the paintings looked like before Moderbacher hung them. She said the content simply didn't fit with what people expect to see at the Community Center.

"It's sort of like the library being a quiet place," she said. "It just wasn't the venue."

See Paintings, page C2

## PAINTINGS: Disputed art removed from community center

From page C1

Moderbacher submitted five slides to the commission earlier this year to be considered for a show at the community center, including a series of eight small paintings titled "Road Trip" that had all been condensed onto one slide.

O'Connell said that, based on the slides, the seven-member commission thought Moderbacher's talent deserved a show and allowed her to install more than 20 paintings.

Moderbacher put up the paintings Dec. 3.

But, before any of the commissioners had an opportunity to visit the show over the weekend, several complaints were registered early on Dec. 6.

"None of us realized that there were bodies by the side of the road," she said. "We didn't realize the content."

All eight "Road Trip" paintings were taken down the same day the complaints were lodged, as well as several other paintings

that feature bodies beside the road and another in which three people are beating up someone in the road.

The commissioner acting as show curator called Moderbacher to offer a side room for displaying the paintings featuring bodies as well as the opportunity to rehang them in the main room for the show's opening Dec. 7.

But that seemed like censorship to Moderbacher because she said she sent along blown-up images of the more graphic paintings featuring bodies.

"They should back the artist, not bend down because four people complained," she said. "Art is supposed to stir up emotions."

O'Connell said the commission explains in its guidelines that all pieces of art are subject to review once they have been hung. But Moderbacher said it's censorship — plain and simple.

"They say they'll review it, but that's not the right to take it down," she said.

O'Connell said there are at



Special to the IJ/Nina Zhitto

**DISPUTE:** Eileen Starr Moderbacher prepares to take her controversial paintings off a wall at Mill Valley Community Center. The center told her to remove the paintings after it received complaints about them.

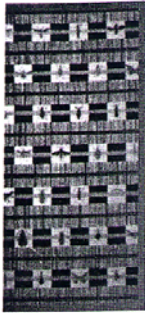
least 20 different venues for showing art in Mill Valley and Moderbacher's work would have been fine anywhere else but at the Community Center. She said the commission has a duty to not only respect the artist but the audience at the Community Center. "I don't feel like we censored it," she said. "We followed our guidelines."

For her part, Moderbacher said she's pleased to have shown her work and sold several paintings, but the real opportunity was to stand up for the right to freedom of expression.

"I don't regret anything that's happened," she said.

Contact Tad Whitaker via e-mail at [twhitaker@marinij.com](mailto:twhitaker@marinij.com)





s in Rhythm, 2002, 60"; below: Merav I Love, 2003, wood, belt, 37-1/2" x 48" land.

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e creatures

themselves. Walking around the exhibi-  
tion. It's hard not to feel their physical  
presence. While admiring *Louis Kanz  
Lion*, with his fine floral tapestry coat and  
wooden claw feet, it feels like someone is  
looking over your shoulder, hovering.  
There is.

It's Heffernon's *Rabbinoïd, Male*, hold-  
ing up the wall, clad in vest, shorts and  
bowtie, a life-sized kind of jack (rabbit),  
casually surveying the room like a dandy  
sizing up the hares in an uptown (meat  
market) bar. It's a bit eerie. But he's just  
checking out the *Rabbinoïd, Female*.

—Saunthy Nicolson-Singh

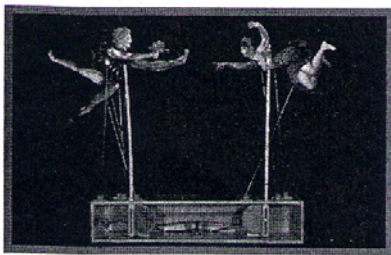
*Humanimals and Their Kin: The Art of  
Gerald Heffernon* closed in August at the  
Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento.

Saunthy Nicolson-Singh is a freelance  
writer based in Sacramento.

## 'New Visions' at Pro Arts

**T**he exhibition  
*New Visions:  
Introductions 04*  
at Pro Arts in  
its new location  
in Oakland,  
juried by Rene  
di Rosa and

Jack Rasmussen, included sixty-eight  
works by sixty-one artists in various  
media and formats: paintings, drawings,  
sculpture, photographs and mixed media.  
With this many works and artists, it is  
remarkable that the pieces chosen have  
great consistency in their high quality,  
technical diversity and skillful execution.  
Thematically, the subject matter across  
the works reveals little that is violent,  
shocking, or outré, except perhaps for  
Dorian Katz's ink drawing, *Cult of the  
Bath*, Merav Tzur's humorous kinetic  
sculpture, *I've nian I Love #1*, Eileen  
Moderbacher's dark series of eight panel  
maintinings. *Road Trin*. Raleigh Freeman's  
flashy, surreal *Travellers*, and Anthony  
Holdsworth's political street painting,  
*Regime Change Comes to Oakland*. Notable  
among other sculptures on view are  
Jessica Henricks's *Teem*, a constructed  
steel frame covered with swarming pieces  
of leather, Karin Lusnak's elegant *Parallel  
Lives*, Liz Maxwell's papier-mâché bust



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portrait, *Student*, and Nancy Legge's fired  
clay, weird vegetative object, *Fia*.

Katz's fascinating ink drawing on  
paper depicts an occult and obscure bath  
ritual of a mysterious androgynous  
emperor, who is surrounded by descrip-  
tive text with overt sexual implications,  
like "The Emperor's lusts were distinct  
and precise," and "The Eunuch snatches  
a clay pot off the gargoyle's head at the  
center of the mantle (*sic*)." Tzur's kinetic  
sculpture, electronically operated, ani-  
mates two flat, cutout figures, an ideal-  
ized winged male lover on the left and  
his proposed consort on the right. They  
swing back and forth toward and away  
from each other on extended rods. The  
crowned lover, like a winged Cupid,  
offers to the woman, as they come  
together, a bouquet of flowers in one  
hand and a forbidden fruit, a peach, in  
the other. The woman, a self-portrait of  
the artist, wears a classic Greek crown.  
She extends her right arm out to touch  
the fruit, as the flying figures come  
together. Her extended arm is a replica of  
the famous hand of God reaching out to  
touch Adam in Michelangelo's painting  
*The Creation of Man* in the Sistine  
Chapel. This is a humorous and satiric  
"working" representation of the vicissi-  
tudes of courtship and love.

Moderbacher's *Koad Trip* tells an eerie  
tale of a gloomy road scene, where each  
painted panel shows the same curving  
freeway with the same receding trailer  
truck in the background. In the fore-  
ground of each panel, however, bodies  
form the landscape, progressively more  
realized, in the first panels sketchy and  
outlined, until in the last panel they are  
fully depicted, piled on both sides of the  
roadway. This is a ghost tale of spirits left  
behind, disposed to remain in some trav-  
eler's dark purgatory. These panels are so  
beautifully painted, however, that their  
cumulative emotional impact, though  
ominous and gloomy, is somehow peace-  
ful, inevitable and predestined. Freeman's  
*Travellers*, on the other hand, is a slick  
and colorful cartoon of alien forms and  
creatures, except for two central icons, a  
strange bunny and an illuminated light  
bulb in the foreground. These are  
trapped in a frame bordered by little tele-  
vision sets or computer screens. These  
figures are in fact video travelers, origi-  
nating in computer games and digitized  
cartoons.

Holdsworth's *Regime Change Comes to  
Oakland* converts one of his typically  
beautiful cityscapes into an overt political  
statement, where the street scene shows a  
man spread out with his arms up, lying in  
the center of the street, as if captured by  
the police. A tank looms in the right  
background. This is clearly a new direc-  
tion for this well-known local painter.

Other works that deserve special men-  
tion are Jeffrey Kramm's soft pastel full  
nude portrait, *Stephen*, which is technical-  
ly rich and masterful, with the nude fig-  
ure sitting on a log in a teeming natural  
setting of dried grass and flowers; Audrey

Wallace-Taylor's graphite drawing, *Sierra  
Footbills*; Jon Kerpel's op art painting,  
*Insects in Rhythm*; Robert Horning's *High  
Rise*, which meticulously presents urban  
beetles in various leisure activities in  
their contemporary condo; and David  
Herbold's floating sculpture, *Searching II*,  
a series of suspended boats with male fig-  
ure and fish, showing the man first con-  
templating alone in his boat, then look-  
ing into the "water" at the fish, reaching  
down to touch a golden fish, then diving  
off the boat, and finally swimming with  
the fish beneath the empty boat above.  
The serenity and empathetic effect of  
this sequential sculpture is remarkable  
for recreating the sensation of a water  
world.

The imaginative diversity, variety and  
eclectic nature of the works in this ex-  
hibition confirm the health and good  
prospects for the future of art in the  
region.

—Frank Cebulski

*New Visions: Introductions 04* closed in  
August at Pro Arts, Oakland. Other artists in  
the exhibition included Peter Andrea, Jenny  
Ballise, Sydney Bell, Priscilla Birge, Sandra  
Bradman, Lawrie Brown, Lesley Cantor-  
Fallihee, Susan Casentini, Carrie Chesire,  
Michael Conrad, Elliot Daughtry, Jamie Erfurdt,  
Miriam Fagan, P. K. Frizzell, Terry Furry, Suzie  
Geluz, Lisa Glicksman, Timothy Robert  
Gratkowski, Lori Hanson and Lawrence  
Lincoln, Catherine Hart, Sue Heinemann, Kris  
Iwasaki, Joanna Katz, Barbara Kossy, Elana  
Kundell, Gaelyn Lakin, Mari Marks, Sandra  
McHenry, Scott Melcher, Aerial Mulvaney,  
Daisuke Nakabayashi, Michelle Nye, Jon Orvik,  
Carol Paquet, Christine Petty, Matthew Purdon,  
Jim Rosenau, Susan Shaddick, Danielle  
Shelley, Joyce Shon, Eric Smith, Rebecca  
Szatkowski, Heidi Tarver, Ama Torrance, Sean  
Darius Vickery, Robert Volbrechtz and Mary  
Helene Wagner.

Frank Cebulski is a contributing editor to  
*Artweek*.

## 'New Geometries' at Thacher Gallery, USF

**T**his pairing of  
two eminent  
Bay Area artists  
and educators  
makes for chal-  
lenging and  
rewarding  
viewing.

Combining realism and abstraction,  
Cherie Raciti and Patricia Walsh inter-  
pret the nature/culture divide anew,  
demonstrating that the natural world  
continues as a viable subject for art.

Raciti's matte acrylic and gouache  
paintings inhabit a hybrid pictorial space  
between 2-D and 3-D, and an emotional  
space between revelation and elegy. With  
serpentine shapes modeled in low relief  
set atop scumbled, seuffed backgrounds,