
KENNETH BAKER

Art

Manifold 'Sensations' From Earth to Moon

Yerba Buena show
covers a lot of ground

Yerba Buena Center for the Arts shows things made with artistic intent alongside things that might be mistaken for art if nothing were known about their intent. This practice fits a time when anything at all may turn up under the rubric of art.

"Multiple Sensations," which opens today, fulfills the center's curious mission as well as any set of exhibitions it has presented to date.

Birth and death, sex, drugs, distraction and destruction, the moon and the stars (of stage and screen) all figure in, loosely strung on the theme of collections.

"Starstruck" arrays hundreds of items of celebrity memorabilia from the archives of Gary Lee Boas, who has been buttonholing notables since 1966.

Look at a few of his yellowing snapshots, and they seem like the outcome of lucky chance encounters. Everyone from Ursula Andress to Frank Zappa is here. Look at a hundred, 200, and the famous and almost-famous alike start to seem like letters in some vast crossword puzzle — a sprawling Hollywood Squares of Boas' imagining.

A completely different spirit animates Julian Rosefeldt's "Global Soap" (2000) and Piero Steinle's "Ekstase" (2000). But then, Rosefeldt and Steinle are Europeans and much younger than Boas.

Rosefeldt watched countless hours of soap opera from around the world and culled brief clips, summed up in giant stills, that show how a narrow lexicon of gestures, shots and facial expressions pervades the genre, no matter the language of the dialogue.

In "Ekstase" Steinle has made a parallel study of video pornography.

Anyone who responded to the films in Bruce Conner's recent retrospective will marvel at Rosefeldt and Steinle's use of found footage in their collaborative piece "Detonation Deutschland" (1996).

On seven screens enveloping a room, they project carefully edited documentary footage of old buildings in Germany being dynamited to make way for new. One does not have to watch for long to see and hear in this rumbling progress the civilian equivalent of war.

Counterpoint to "Detonation Deutschland" is Michael Light's "Drift, 29 days and 18 hours" (1999). A silent, single-screen black-and-white video, it reprises the photographs taken of the moon by orbiting American astronauts that formed last year's exhibition "Full Moon" at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

Watching the stills run together on video is a little like looking at a flip-book of moon shots. It makes the climax of NASA's engineering from only 30 years ago look startlingly antique.

Another quiet passage in "Multiple Sensations" is Michael Wenyon and Susan Gamble's "Bibliomania," a corridor lined with softly glowing holograms.

Along one wall are the spines of books chosen from the venerable Boston Atheneum, including Rudolf Arnheim's "Art and Visual Perception," "Art Criticism From a Laboratory," "Wonders of the Invisible World" and "Books for Tired Eyes."

The opposite wall displays holograms of old card catalog drawers. The holograms give the books and



Scenes from "Detonation Deutschland" by Julian Rosefeldt and Piero Steinle, part of "Multiple Sensations" at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts.

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Insects Chow Down at Yerba Buena

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drawers the look of specters at a seance in a future, postliterate age.

Closer to the bounds of art are Catherine Chalmers' huge digital color prints of insect and animal predation. Her "Food Chain" (1994-96) moves from a caterpillar devouring a tomato to its demise in the jaws of a praying mantis to the mantis' disappearance at the flick of a frog's tongue.

Chalmers' pictures are as fastidious as their subject matter is grisly.

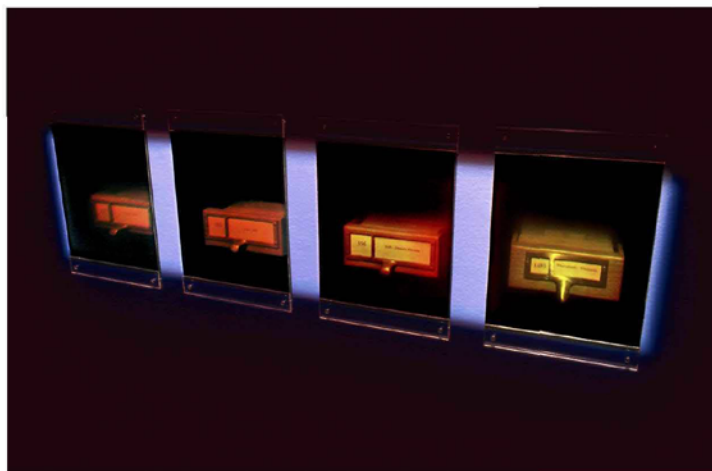
"Pierogi 2000," a flat file archive of contemporary artists' works that viewers can explore on their own, is like a museum in itself. Assembled by Brooklyn artist Joe Amrhein, it is an ever-expanding resource that parallels the official world of art institutions.

The weak link in "Multiple Sensations" is Australian-born Tracey Moffatt's recent photo series "Laudanum" and "Invocations," although her and Gary Hillberg's video montage of Hollywood portrayals of artists is not to be missed.

Finally, there is a scattering of works from the "invisible Museum," a London private collection of contemporary art whose contents are almost always dispersed on loan to individuals, nearly undoing the idea of a collection.

The most memorable "invisible" work here is Emma Kay's "The Bible From Memory" (1997), a single page of micro-fine print that is exactly what its title says.

E-mail Kenneth Baker at bakerk@sfgate.com.



Holograms of card catalog shelves make up an eerie part of "Bibliomancy" by Michael Wenyon and Susan Gamble.

EXHIBITIONS

MULTIPLE SENSATIONS: SERIES, COLLECTIONS, OBSESSIONS. STARSTRUCK: Photographs and memorabilia of Gary Lee Boas. **BIBLIOMANCY:** A holographic installation by Michael Wenyon and Susan Gamble. **PIROGI 2000:** Flat files full of works by 300 artists. **FOOD CHAIN, SEX (BEFORE, DURING, AFTER), AND PINKIES:** Photographs by Catherine Chalmers. **GLOBAL SOAP, EKSTASE AND DETONATION DEUTSCHLAND:** Video and photographs by Julian Rosefeldt and Piero Steinle. **ON THE EDGE OF THE WESTERN WORLD: LOANS FROM INVISIBLE MUSEUM:** Works in many media by various artists. **DRIFT:** Video by Michael Light. **TRACEY MOFFATT: NEW WORKS:** Video and photographs. **MARK DEAN VECA:** Wall paintings. Through October 22. Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, 701 Mission St., San Francisco. (415) 978-2787. www.yerbabuenaarts.org.