

AT THE GALLERIES

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Articulating the Inability to Articulate

CHULA VISTA—What initially sounds like laughter in the video portion of Liss Platt's installation, "Silent Treatments and Talking Cures," gradually takes on the more disturbing tone of hysterical raving. As the camera

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skittishly charts the features of a laughing woman's face, her guffaws sound more and more desperate—she is laughing, it seems, because she doesn't know what else to say.

The failure or inability to articulate feelings and meanings is at the heart of Platt's disarming work, now at Southwestern College Art Gallery, along with the installations of Ellen Phillips and Joyce Cutler-Shaw. Ironically, Platt's own installation is the most articulate and moving of the three. Phillips's work feels shoddy and diffuse, by contrast, and Cutler-Shaw's, though poignant, tends to wander. The show, curated by gallery director Larry Urrutia, is titled "Three in One." It is part of IN/SITE 92, a program of temporary artists' installations designed for sites from San Diego to Tijuana and organized under

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the auspices of Installation Gallery.

Platt, who recently received her master of fine arts degree from UC San Diego and is now living in New York, lined the walls of her portion of the gallery with a wide band of red satin. Upon the fabric she has mounted black and white photographic panels that correspond to the theme of silence. Several of these crisply stylized, staged images show a huge animal tongue, excised from its owner's mouth and held in a woman's hands or observed intently from a slight distance. In others, a woman buries her face in a pillow, tosses alphabet letters in the air or sorts tiny alphabet macaroni into separate piles spelling out the word *utter*.

A woman with pins clasped between her lips stares out of one of the photographs. Another tilts her head back and balances a fragile bubble on her lips. Both of these acts preclude speech, and the images reinforce Platt's concern with stifled, futile and thwarted communication. A shattered wine glass and its dispersed shards reappear in several images also, linking the notions of loss, fragility and incompleteness with that of uncomfortable silence.

The video monitor stands unceremoniously in the center of the room, emitting that continuous, agonizing sound of gasping, hysterical laughter. The woman on screen appears to be purging some deep-seated emotion, but her cure feels as desperate, extreme and unfulfilling as the silence that surrounds her. In this installation, Platt has powerfully evoked the chasm between the two states of silence and sound, and yet demonstrated their frightening similarity. Both can equally frustrate the exchange of information, the conveyance of meaning.

Ellen Phillips, a local artist, presents an installation here that suggests just how empty profuse sound can be. Her "Bridging No. 8" combines wire, sand, rocks, nails, plastic cups and forks, messages written on strips of clear plastic, artificial flowers and chain link fencing in an effort to communicate a sense of coming together, of touching and communication itself. Assemblages of these materials intersect in a central cross on the floor, which is covered with dark plastic sheeting.

Phillips tries here to penetrate profound sociological issues through formal means, and, though her effort is earnest, it is also awkward and nondescript. Visually quite loud, with its busy interplay of textures, the work actually says little and offers just as little to truly engage the eye.

Joyce Cutler-Shaw's installation, "Graphic Notes From 'The Anatomy Lesson,'" is, as the title suggests, an excerpt from a larger body of work. Cutler-Shaw, who lives in San Diego, has been developing a series of collages, performances and installations on the



Photo by Liss Platt from "Silent Treatments and Talking Cures."

theme of the anatomy lesson since 1975. The drawings, photographs and poem displayed in the current show each can be intensely poignant, but their combination here feels fragmented and scattered.

We are connected to history and to each other through our bodies, Cutler-Shaw suggests here. We are living fossils, our bones rich in information about our lives, our environment and our deaths. In a poem mounted on a hanging scroll, the artist writes: "We scatter our remains as the/Remnants of a lively conversation/Encoded in an alphabet of bones."

Cutler-Shaw has actually devised a lively, calligraphic alphabet based on the bones of birds, and she presents a translation of her poem in this private language as well.

Cut-out drawings of skeletons dance with their silhouetted shadows across three walls of the installation, and, on the fourth, these decorative conceits give way to reverent studies of corpses. In these life-sized drawings, Cutler-Shaw indulges our voyeuristic fascination with the human body *terminally stopped*, its flesh functionless and eroding, its bones taking new prominence as structure and remnant.

Seeing these toe-tagged mortals and reading Cutler-Shaw's musings on the nature of bones is enough to send one tumbling deep into self-reflection. If the body is the site of human contact and "the matrix of the human condition," as the artist writes in a wall statement, shouldn't we know more about it?

Cutler-Shaw is clearly curious about the physical appearance of the human body as it evolves through an individual life as well as through longer, historical periods. But she also probes the relationship between internal and external realities and asks why our growing scientific knowledge of what it means to be human has not made us any more humane. These questions, along with the artist's sensitive images, make for a provocative installation.

"Three in One" continues at Southwestern College Art Gallery, 900 Otay Lakes Road., Chula Vista, through Nov. 6. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Friday 10-2, Wednesday and Thursday 6-9 p.m.

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Chuck Collings' five large sculptural vessels on the floor of the David Zapf Gallery are collectively called "Resolve," but this sugges-

tion of clarity, analysis and purpose feels secondary to the tremendously tactile nature of the work. The conical, oval and pinch-waisted works are constructed meticulously from small trapezoids of plywood, glued together in bands. The concentric rhythm of their construction and the striated pattern of the plywood give the objects the vague feeling of oversized baskets. At the same time they have an organic simplicity, like seashells with wide-mouthed cavities opening upward.

The elegance of the works translates also to a series of smaller sculptures on pedestals in a side gallery, though these lack the physical charge of the works on the floor. Notations in paint, pencil and other media hang on the walls around the works. They, too, are simple and elegant, but seem peripheral.

Collings, who was born in California and now lives in Denmark, endows his work with great formal integrity, and the meditative, repetitive process of their construction does transfer, in a sense, to the viewer—these orderly, tension-free objects exude calm. Mostly, however, they are simply beautiful.

David Zapf Gallery, 2400 Kettner Blvd., through Oct. 31. Gallery hours are Friday and Saturday 12-5 and by appointment. (232-5004).