

SAN DIEGO COUNTY
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SECTION

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AT THE GALLERIES

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Power With Resolution

SAN DIEGO—Theater *wunderkind* Peter Sellars explained after a San Diego performance a few years ago that, for him, it was enough to give his audience a series of experiences. Plot resolution, narrative logic and coherent structure are not essential, he implied; strong impressions are.

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Many of the installation artists whose works are on view during the 2-month-long program, IN/SITE 92 (under the auspices of Installation Gallery), seem to operate with the same directives in mind. Their works have presence, power even, but when it comes to pinning down the meaning behind the gestures, one is left mainly with amorphous sensations, the suggestion of importance, if not the thing itself.

This is enough for director Sellars, and, if it is enough for viewers of the current installations, then stimulation and satisfaction can be had throughout town.

Palomar College's Boehm Gallery is presenting installations by Marcia Olson and Nanette Yanzuzzi Macias that skim the surface of deep, social phenomena relating to the way women take control of their bodies and their lives. In a mixed-use building downtown, Jason Tannen has blended literary and cinematic

impulses to create a rich and moody installation. At Mission Brewery Plaza, Installation Gallery has organized several installations that each have their evocative, provocative moments, including a quietly moving work by Judit Hersko, an atmospheric environment by Adolfo Davila, and a quirky, participatory space by Melissa Smedley and Olav Westphalen.

Olson's installation, "3,584 Patterns and Counting. . .," at Palomar, is the most physically enveloping of the current offerings. It occupies two of the three rooms of the Boehm Gallery, filling each from floor to ceiling with materials relating to the craft of sewing. Olson, a graduate student at UC San Diego, has covered the walls of the larger gallery with an orderly mosaic of pattern envelopes illustrating garments for women and children. She has carpeted the floor with unbleached muslin and wrapped a sewing machine and ladder in the same gauzy fabric.

On a wooden table in the center of the room, Olson has placed four handmade books that help give this work both heart and soul. Though the room is compelling as sculpture, what it has to say about the way women's behavior is "patterned" and regimented does not surface with much impact except through the books, which are made from waxed pages of old sewing instructions. Olson applied texts to these pages describing her recent road trip home to South Dakota and her encounters with women in both Southern California and the Midwest who have sold or donated old patterns to support the artist's project.

Through these diaristic entries, Olson subtly critiques the system of confinement that women have been subjected to by prevailing fashion, but she also shows how women have humanized that system, how they have personalized and individualized their craft and come to regard the tissue-paper patterns they work with as skin, as family, and the old buttons that fill a sewing basket as part of the history of that family. A gentle reverence for women's industry and ingenuity pervades the space.

→ **L**ike the Boehm Gallery works, Tannen's installation, "Shadow Town," in an old church building downtown, also establishes its emotional tenor through environmental means. In the most effective part of this work, Tannen has furnished a small room in the manner of a slightly seedy hotel room, complete with a soundtrack of telephones ringing endlessly, feet thumping up the stairs, as well as an occasional scream and siren. Tannen has effectively set his environment in the fertile zone between reality and fiction by cleverly fusing real space and represented objects. The phone, light fixture and other furnishings, for instance, are sculpted and painted, rather than actual and functional. The window shade is pulled most of the way down, but a small slice of a view is provided by a photograph of a street scene propped between the window and the sill.

Tannen, a local artist, quotes the writer Raymond Chandler in his wall statement for the show, and the influence of old detective novels and films can be felt throughout. In the recreated hotel room, a picture hanging askew affords a look through a peephole in the

wall, where Tannen projects slides of an empty street at night, an abandoned lobby, a table full of letters and photographs. These stills, as well as the row of related black-and-white prints hanging in a separate room, are thick with melodrama and intrigue.

The photographs, hotel room and a third area made to look like a police desk are of a piece, thematically, but they are not well integrated spatially. Plastic sheeting defines their boundaries and patches of open space without any character stand between the vignettes. Despite this structural flaw, Tannen's installation has a wonderfully moody feel, somewhere between the paintings of Edward Hopper and the environments of Edward Kienholz.