

THE TAMPA TRIBUNE

Sunday, April 25, 2004

COVIVANT GALLERY

4906 NORTH FLORIDA AVENUE
TAMPA, FLORIDA 33603
T 813.234.0222 WWW.COIVANT.COM

*From
New York with Love*

From New York with Love curated by Trong G. Nguyen

April 9 - May 9, 2004

Reception: Friday, April 9th, from 7-11pm

FRITZ CHESNUT
A CONSTRUCTED WORLD
RODNEY DICKSON
ERIC DOERINGER
KATY GRANNAN
LISA KERESZI
TERENCE KOH
JANA LEO
DAN LEVENSON
JILLIAN MCDONALD
RYAN MCGINLEY
BUXTON MIDYETTE
GABRIELE PICCO
PRAXIS
ASHKAN SAHIH
KAREN SORENSEN
CHARMAINE WHEATLEY
EDWINA WHITE
ABBEY WILLIAMS

TO: _____



Love From N.Y.

By JOANNE MILANI

TAMPA -They are no longer making episodes of "Sex and the City," but sex in the city, of course, never ceases. The quest for love, or merely a fling, in the anonymous Big Apple is at the center of "From New York With Love," an excellent, witty show by rising New York art stars.

This is a quality show that belongs in a museum, possibly the Tampa Museum of Art, if only that lethargic institution would shake off its addiction to prepackaged, rented exhibitions.

As it is, you can be grateful the nonprofit storefront Covivant Gallery, which operates on a shoestring, has managed to bring to Tampa 18 of New York's best and brightest, among them twenty- to fortysomethings included in current and past Whitney Biennials. The Whitney Biennials are showcases of the art world's certified up-and-comers, picked by curators from New York's prestigious Whitney Museum of American Art.

So, if you wonder what the latest trends look like in the center of the art world, trek to Covivant and take in the smart art assembled by University of South Florida graduate and current New Yorker Trong G. Nguyen.

But leave the kids at home - because of the frank and funny sexual nature of some works. Most of the videos, installations and paintings in the show are filled with a longing for intimate, exceedingly personal relationships in an environment that is crowded, impersonal and anonymous.

Consider Abbey Williams' hilarious video titled "Yes," in which she videotaped men riding on New York's subways. Rating the men, the recent graduate of Bard College asks herself if she would date them. She labels them: Yes. No. Maybe. Hers is a private version of reality television in which the survivors are pushed upstairs to the status of "The Bachelor" or are kicked into dating oblivion.

Angel Obsession

Irish-born 40ish Rodney Dickson invented a fictitious fortysomething bachelor who is obsessed with former Charlie's Angel Tanya Roberts. Dickson put together a room installation - call it a shrine - titled "Heaven," which is filled with photos, sketches and video clips of the sex kitten of the 1970s and 1980s. Dickson sent photos of Roberts to artists in Japan and asked them to copy the images. Then he retouched them. The results are portraits of Roberts that are many, many steps removed from the originals. Dickson's "Heaven" is a display of the nature of solitary obsession in which the famous love object is never directly touched by the worshipper.

This is a natural extension of Andy Warhol's paintings of Marilyn Monroe and Jackie Onassis. Warhol painted celebrities' printed images, not the individuals.

The theme of solitary obsession, of a yearning for intimacy in a rushed, crowded world, is taken up by Jillian McDonald. In her video, "Me and Billy Bob," the 33-year-old Canadian digitally inserts herself into movie clips of Billy Bob Thornton. What you see is a love relationship that certainly would be news to the actor, considering he has never met McDonald. Instead of movie dialogue, the video is accompanied by Thornton's growly voice on "Starlight Lounge," a song from the actor's CD "Public Radio."

Another work addresses how people make contact in an impersonal world. In "Love Research," performance artist Karen Sorenson sets up a table and a microphone on a New York sidewalk and asks passers-by to record answers to personal questions: "What do you love?" "Where did you see love today?" "Have you ever been without love?" "Have the events of 9/11 affected you?" It's remarkable how direct and revealing people are in their recorded responses, which you hear in the show.

'Pray For Me'

Perhaps the most unexpected and moving piece in the exhibit is an interactive performance project by Praxis, the husband-and-wife duo of Brainard Carey and Delia Baho. Praxis twists contemporary marketing methods into an artwork that pushes strangers into intimate contact. In a gallery that has one wall mimicking red, white and blue stained glass, they place a stanchion with fliers and the words: Pray for me. If you fill out one of the fliers and mail or e-mail it in, Praxis will do what it calls a "telepathic performance" for you. Is this piece, which also appears in USF's Centre Gallery and in Viva La Frida's Galeria y Cafe, sincere or a cynical aping of television evangelism? You decide.

The flier echoes the sentiments found throughout this wonderful show that veers among moments of individual ecstasy, anonymous obsession, intimate yearning and loneliness in a mass society: "Are you looking for a miracle in your life? If we offered to pray for you for anything at all, would you seize the opportunity? ... Drop off your prayer request and we will perform it for you - yes, we will pray - so change your life, make a wish."