

BAY AREA REPORTER ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

June 23

So Intense

Tumult of Voices Is Heard in New Langton Gay/Lesbian Exhibit

by Christian Huygen

When is an art show like a no-holds-barred high-heeled mud wrestling match? When it's "Situation," a show that pulls together work by 36 gay and lesbian artists, on view at New Langton Arts through July 13.

The show is as vigorous and diverse as the group of people who made it: artists of every class and color are represented here. Their work forms a wonderfully chaotic tumult of voices. Like good sex, "Situation" surprises you, makes you laugh, makes you squirm, and leaves you wanting more, more, more. It's better than *Cats*.

The exhibition was co-curated by Pam Gregg and Nayland Blake. Gregg told me, "It surprised me how well the art by lesbians and gay men worked together; I was pleased that there seemed to be so many dialogues, crossings and layering between the different works. Installing the show was really a process of

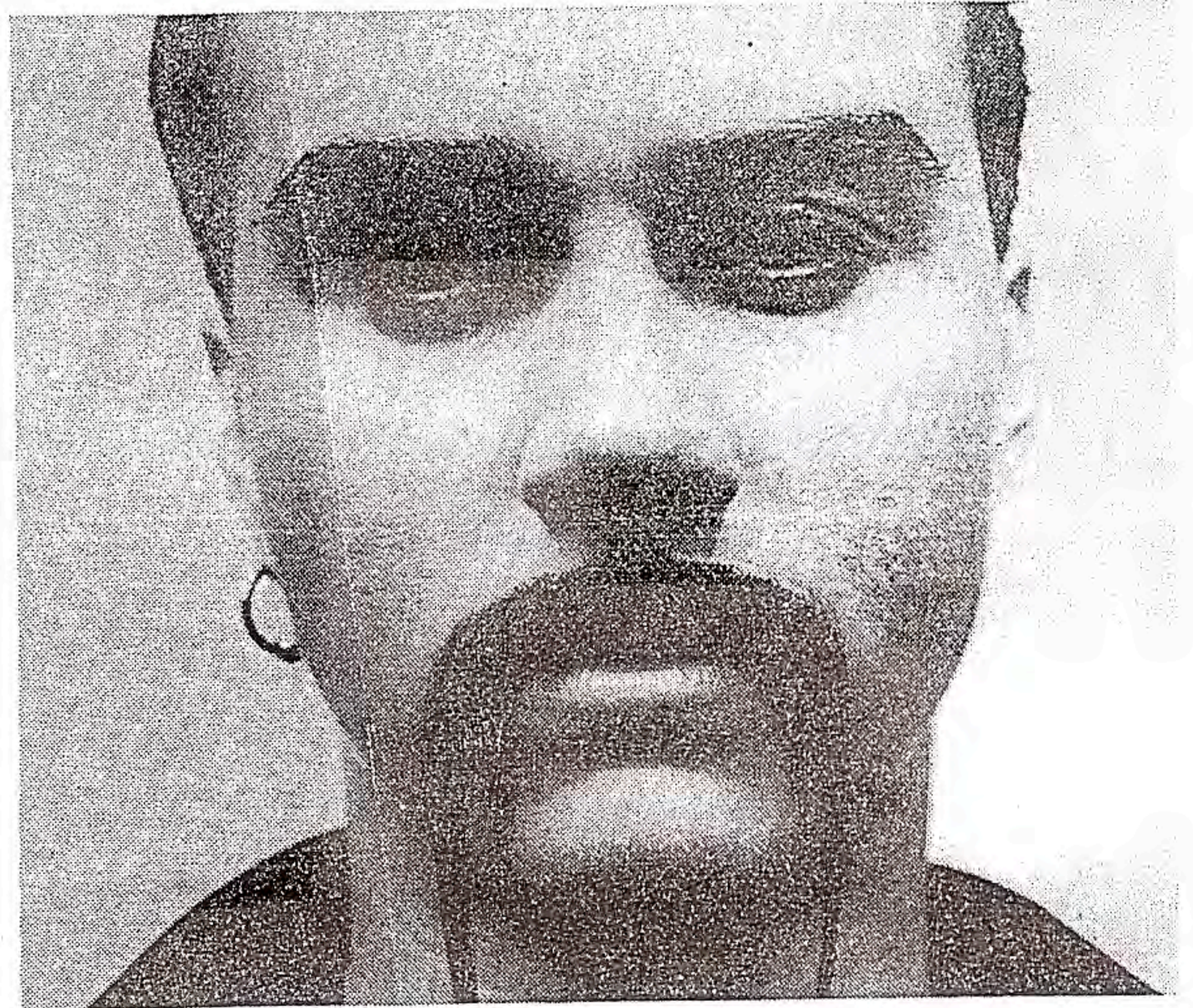
discovering those intersections and connections."

Writing the Rules

For starters, G.B. Jones playfully tries on Tom of Finland's oversized boots to see if they fit her and the shoplifting biker girls she draws. In her hands, representation and objectification become a game — and she gets to write the rules.

Then John Lindell dissolves an orgy into a ghostly schematic of orifices which form a lovely, disembodied constellation on the gallery wall. And Rodney O'Neal Austin loops the first words ever spoken over a telephone wire back upon images of a porn film kiss that overflow the piece's gilt-edged frame, playfully referring to the artist's day job as a phone-sex worker.

Cliff Hengst enshrines cigarettes, Madonna songs, and clothing, and then suggests where one might find redemption from all of this. (Captain Midnight Art Decoder Secret Hint: those names you can't quite read



What you see first is not always what you get: Catherine Opie, *Pigpen*; C-print, 17x21 in.

aren't Cliff's old boyfriends; they're, well, they're actors who've done work in a video format.) And Carrie Yamaoka's cover version of *Tropic of Cancer* reads several different ways, including *This is what I have to do to male literature just so I can find something in it of interest to*

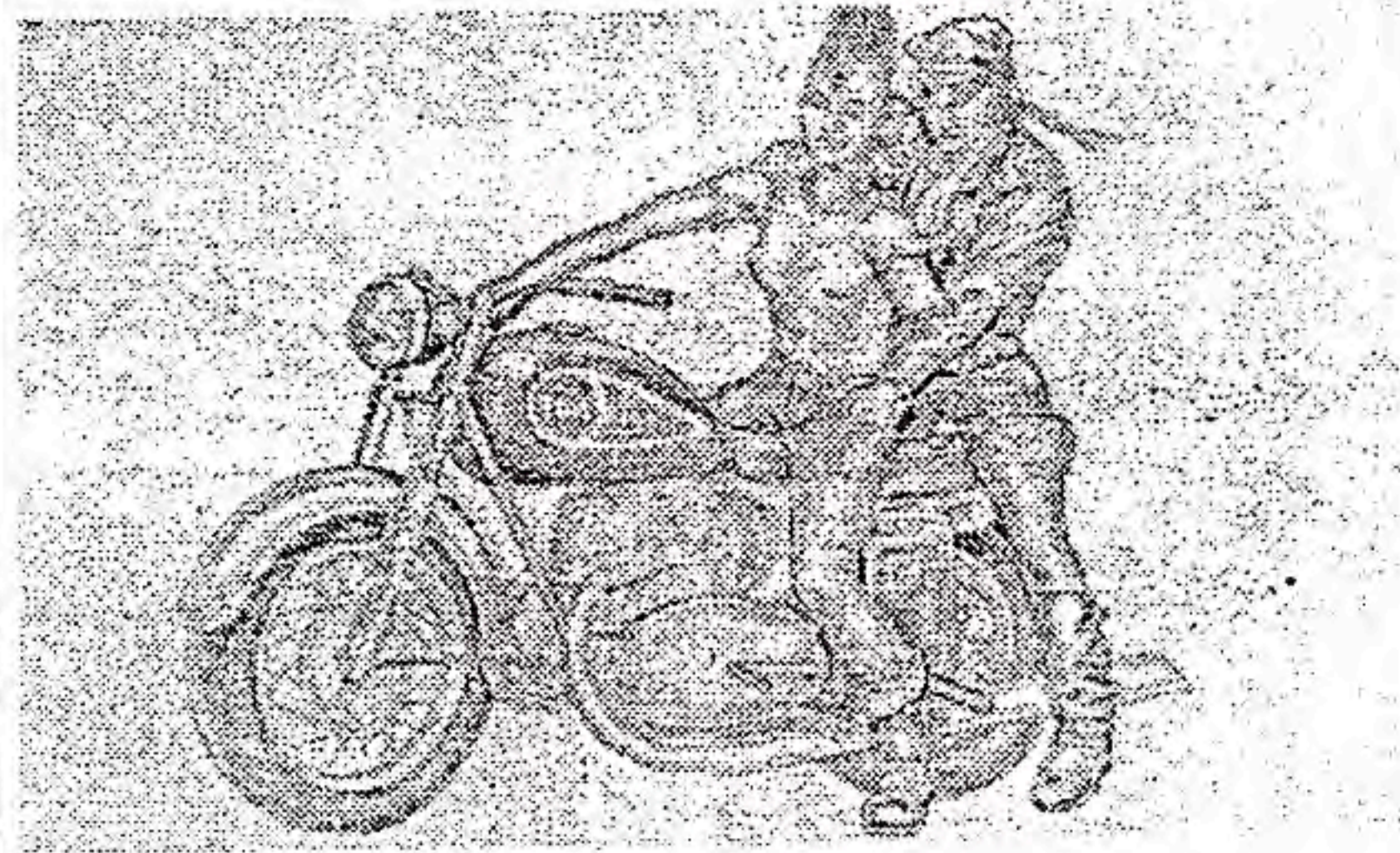
me and This is what I have to do to male literature just to keep from being hurt by it.

Cary Leibowitz throws back at us the names we've given to the bars where we meet each other; they form a bittersweet poetry of winks and lingering glances. Ester Hernandez nos enseña "La

Troquera," una obrera que lleva una sonrisa secreta, unfante, provocativa, sensu. And Rex Ray goes head head with Duchamp — but, always, the *Fountain* is y.

Wrought iron turns as uid as the smoke from a d queen's cigarette, and vel

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G.B. Jones, *Motorcycle Girls*

oozes and drips, in D-L Alvarez's sphinxlike *Flourish (pair)*, and in Brett Reichman's *Squeaker*, a child's toy becomes a marker for abuse and terror ... unless, of course, that's just me projecting again.

Monica Majoli's untitled paintings are either chilling allegories or beautifully crafted snuff or — better — both. Her tiny painting of a wrist with a small cut on it, held out to us as if it were some kind of evidence, is eloquent, understated and unforgettable.

Improbable Triumph

Millie Wilson casts in bronze the dream symbols of a lesbian's case history, and the objects — a turnip and a potato — become small monuments to an improbable triumph in spite of everything: God, the law and psychotherapy. And in Wayne Smith's monolithic *Boyfriend* (*He Traffics in Men*), broken fragments of language ("He doesn't kiss"; "He doesn't mind the taste of hospital food"; "He got real verbal near the end") go to heaven —

or at least, they get to float in the sky with a backdrop of twinkling stars. Shoot, I'd settle for that.

The work assembled here is inventive, complex, self-conscious and self-critical. Articulate propaganda and personal documentary contend with playful erotica, ribald conceptual humor and spiritual autobiography.

But what's most extraordinary, to this reviewer anyway, are the works that take something familiar — a phrase, a name, a child's toy

or a bit of wrought iron — and tear that thing out of its usual context so that it suddenly points in a hundred unsuspected directions. To see something familiar without its comforting veneer of everydayness can be shocking, surprising, hilarious and terrifying by turns — or all at once. This foreignness found in familiar things is perhaps the quintessential experience of the outsider looking in. "Situation" magnificently captures this outsidersness: splendid, contradictory, complex, wild. ▼



Lyle Ashton Harris, "The Americas — Miss Girl; Kym, Lyle, Crinoline; Miss America" (Photographs).

"Situation" will be on view at New Langton Arts, 1246 Folsom Street, between Eighth and Ninth, until July 13. Gallery hours are 11 a.m.-5 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday. Call 626-5416.