

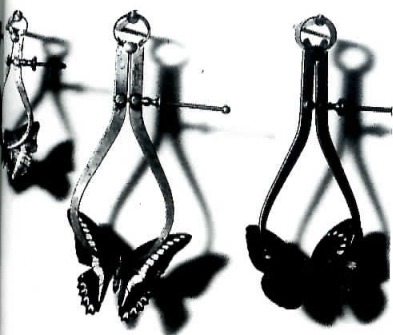


"Straight White Male II"
Invitation card

Michael Damm
Post-epidemic (Mariposas), 1995
Butterflies, calipers, nails
26" x 8" x 2"

Liz Miller
High Life, 1995
Enamel on bottles of malt liquor

Terri Friedman
Sunny Von Bulow Is Still Alive, 1995
Installation view



tic piece—with a deck chair, patch of astroturf, tourist-agency poster of a tropical coast, and rather extravagant headset with earphones and a tiny video screen—doesn't do much other than suggest that the commodification of nature as a vacation luxury spot is problematic. This is indisputable, but the piece annoys me both for failing to

take its premise anywhere and for the usual authoritarianism of interactive pieces which require one to follow instructions. languishes in a diabetic coma—allegedly induced by her husband—amid immense hospital luxury. Why on earth an artist would address her is unfathomable, unless one regards the piece as a straight-faced take on camp's themes of excess and disproportion, or unless one makes Von Bulow into an allegory for America (or something). The works do suggest the extent to which the heiress might have mutated into her inanimate accouterments and life-support systems, for many of the works do seem like organs. A chandelier with a glass top upon which rest glasses of pink and red fluids, recalling cocktails left behind from a party, is particularly fetching, and a sprawling pump-and-plastic-tube system circulating yellow fluid with glitter in it seems most thematic: a festive life-support machine. Shakelford's white PVC-tube constructions with potted plants refer to organic systems too, albeit more sedately.

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Michael Damm's *B in the Belfry* (1995) literally and figuratively soars above everything else at Push. Comprising a long cable near the high ceiling from which many calipers are hung—each pinching or measuring a dazzling real (dead) butterfly—it's a kind of clothesline of the imagination, and does well what art does best: joining opposites in an irresolvable and therefore endlessly contemplatable conundrum. It seems rather earthbound to recount them here, but they might be the airy and the weighty, the ineffable and the calculated, the organic and the mechanical, and perhaps too that standard example of chaos theory about the incalculable effect of a butterfly's wing-flapping on weather systems across the world. These remind me a little of Rebecca Horn's mechanized butterflies of some years ago, only they arrive at the same general destination with far more simplicity.

Perhaps what is most peculiar about all these new galleries is that in a very practical way they are creating a truly independent culture; this while largely showing work that reflects those aesthetics and attitudes including the pathetic, the abject, the hapless suburban adolescent, the underachieving, and the era-of-diminished-expectations-and-resources so prevalent among younger artists showing now. This is a 180-degree turn from the revolutionary bombast and heroic scale of fairly recent work in publicly funded "alternative" institutions. Perhaps what is most significant is that the artists involved with these new places have modestly reclaimed the full function of artists: to make culture itself, rather than objects for a culture determined elsewhere.

Damm's own gallery, the venerable Victoria Room in the heart of the wino stretch of Sixth Street, features two installations, by Stephen Shackelford and Terri Friedman. Friedman's *Sunny Von Bulow Is Still Alive* (1995) is the more interesting and splashy of the two. Its big glittery works—more faux furnishings than installation elements—are made from exuberantly tawdry, glittery stuff with only the most oblique relation to the subject. The heiress Von Bulow, you may recall,

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