

huddling together for safety in *VILLAGERS*, 1995. They each wear cloaks of brown or black; their eyes are shut. With their arms extended in a stylized manner, these townfolk seem to be puppets or dancers choreographed by Chuong's masterful hand.

The playful gouaches of Dang Xuan Hoa, *WHERE IS MY LUNCH?*, 1996 and *BLACK CAT WITH MASK*, 1996, feature felines on the prowl, painted in a manner which echoes Dubuffet. Other domestic scenes are warmly and richly rendered by Pham Viet Hong Lam, as in *WATCHING OVER THE NEST*, 1996, and Nguyen Van Cuong, whose stark canvas, *FIELD OF DREAMS*, 1995, of two women laborers, their backs to us, standing in a field, looking at the storm clouds brewing in the distance. Let us hope by now the clouds have passed.

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INTER/EST

Stephen Gang Gallery through April 26
BY MICHAEL RUSH

GROUP EXHIBITIONS OFTEN come laden with a curatorial overlay that render meaningful viewing almost impossible. If the curatorial imperative (read verbiage) is too fixed (i.e. "all the artists here deal with boundaries," or "personal cosmologies," whatever these mean), one is always left wondering what the artists are really doing, boxed as they are into a vague grouping that satisfies the curator's needs rather than the artist's. Happily, media artist Sukran Aziz, avoids this pitfall in *Inter/Est*, a very strong collection of work by ten of her friends, essentially, who also happen to be mixed-media artists of the first order. Aziz wisely lets them work their magic without strait-jacketing them into a false thematic scheme.

Obsessive attention to detail is present in the work of Morgan O'Hara and Alan Berliner, both of whom take audial experiences and transform them into beguiling interactive forms. O'Hara exhibits what look at first sight like sixteen Rorschach ink-blot samples painted onto sheet music. Her accompanying artist's statement (actually, artist's book) becomes essential reading: it reveals that these black lacquer-like forms are based on drawings of the movements of the hands of musicians as they play pianos, organs, accordions and the like. O'Hara fixes her eyes on the hands as they dash across the keyboards and attempts to "record" the gestures, as if capturing time and space in her own hand. She then fills in her drawings with three coats of Japanese sumi-e ink on specially printed Czechoslovak music paper. The result is a conceptual treasure in the experimental spirit of John Cage.

Berliner constructs a file of 108 drawers (why not 106 or, god forbid, merely 105?) each with its own built-in taped sound track. When you open each drawer you are greeted (or assaulted) by sounds of snoring, or religious chanting, or typing, or 105 other clearly marked noises. It's a fun house twist on office files.

Aziz's own *REMINISCENCES*, 1997, is an installation in which the viewer creates part of the "art." Instructions appear on a video monitor, encouraging the viewer to read some comic short stories by a thirteenth century sage, Nasreddin Hodja, which are framed on the wall next to the monitor. You are then invited inside a small room where you are encouraged to act out humorous fantasies suggested by your reading while a live camera records your movements and projects them, soundless, on the monitor outside for all to see. The viewer becomes a willing participant in this fanciful, and possibly dangerous, media perfor-

mance.

Joy Wolke, known for her expansive glass constructions, presents *FANDANGO DANCER*, 1997, a wall installation, consisting of branches, glass, bones, a bird, and plaster casts of arms. The unity of elements suggests cycles of growth and decay in this moving meditation on the essentials of nature.

Octogenarian laser artist, Frances Whitney, is also, it turns out, a hat designer. Her Dadaist *MILLINERY MOBILES*, undated, are best described by their apt titles: *THE FOX GOT INTO THE HEN HOUSE* (the feathers are everywhere) or *CARMEN MIRANDA*, a construction worthy of the flamboyant performer. On a more serious note, the women's headgear in Bulent Bas's video, *THE HAND*, is the familiar armor imposed on females in fundamentalist Islamic states. In this repetitive looping of a male hand covering the mouth of his female victim, the silent rage of millions is hauntingly portrayed.

Alison Knowles and Phill Niblock, two mixed-media veterans, one low, the other very high-tech, are studies in contrast. Knowles goes about her art by gathering objects, often from the street, and constructing entire worlds of sound and movement around them. *INDIAN FLOOR MOON*, 1997, has various objects associated with Indian rituals (a magnolia seed pod, hand carved musical instruments) placed in a green-tinted earth circle. They become remnants of a lost time which the viewer is invited to touch and examine. Niblock's mesmerizing *SLIDE PIECE 5B*, undated, is a computer-driven video display of forms (mountains, perhaps) photographed from a 35mm camera then digitized. Images dissolve and disappear into a void.

In all the excellent work here, curator Aziz allows us to create our own