

Space; The Final Frontier?

The Swiss Institute explores the many meanings of space

By Robert Martínez

Space is what you make of it. Whether it be the final frontier, a place to be alone, a fine and private place, a public space; space is defined by its user and proprietor. Often times, vis-à-vis other people.

The new exhibits at the Swiss Institute, *independent loop* and *espace d'espace* shows exactly how many permutations there are to the concept of space. Its panoply of Swiss and American artists all set about defining space on their own terms, often in simple yet effectively thought provoking ways. *Independent loop*, curated by Annette Schindler, and *espace d'espace*, curated by Michele

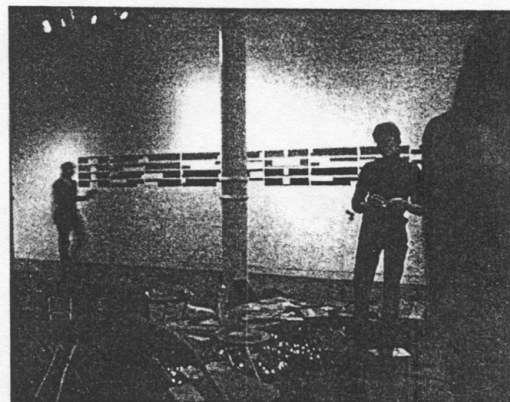
Faguet, are elegant and straightforward, with artworks that make their point subtly but succinctly. The pieces use a variety of techniques - visual, audible, still photo and video - to drive their messages home.

For example, Esther Eppstein makes space her own by simply moving in. Sitting amidst the many photos, lists and paraphernalia from her project *message parlor*, Ms. Eppstein seems perfectly comfortable and at home, even to the point of giving out beer to people who might want to imbibe. She also turns her area of the gallery into a commercial space, by putting up her artworks, a wide array of them, for sale.

Home and hearth become store counter and capitalist domain, giving her take on space several dimensions of accessibility; without money, you're just a browser in her space. Buy one her pieces, and suddenly you're elevated in status to full fledged participant, owning a piece of the action.

Other pieces at the exhibit didn't fare so well. Nika Spalinger's piece became a victim of the exhibit's success. A playful piece illustrating children and their love of secret spaces, Spalinger's exhibit featured a locked door from which the sounds of children emanated. If anyone made the attempt to enter, the laughter stopped. When the knob is released, the children resume their play. Reminiscent of the way children keep their play and space apart from adults, the exhibit's main lure, the voices of the children, was drowned out by the noise of the crowd in attendance, turning the piece into a simple closed door. To be fair, this was opening night, which means a large turnout and with it a lot of noise. During the rest of the shows run, the exhibit will undoubtedly get its chance.

The Spalinger piece notwithstanding, no one could begrudge the evident success of the show. The eclectic blend



Setting up for Esther Eppstein's message parlor.

of pieces and the array of artists proved a big draw, filling the Swiss Institute. "We're at double capacity," said Giselle, the Institute's receptionist. "This is an excellent showing, much more than we had hoped."

Vanessa Samet, the Swiss Institute's Director of Administration and Development, agreed. "This was a great show. All the artists were great. While they were hanging their stuff, they were giving each other tips and advice, and they all got along really well."

The show was also much more diverse than one would have expected, featuring not just Swiss artists, but artists from Latin America and the

States. This extends the reach of the Swiss Institute, making it a haven and stage not just for Swiss artists, but for the artistic community of the world. An example of this internationalism was the Galería Chilena's photo of themselves with the President of Chile, Eduardo Frei, bringing together the public and the artistic in Chile. Sponsorship of the show was international as well, with donations from Pro Helvetia Swissair and LanChile, the Chilean national airline.

All in all, the pieces of *independent loop* and *espace d'espace* work excellently well. Go and see it, and see if you can't get yourself lost in space, or at least in thought.



Members of Galería Chilena with Eduardo Frei (second from left).