



Above: Candace Plummer Gaudiani, installation view, *Conversation #5B-7 and #27B*, 2003, Iris prints on Somerset Velvet paper; below: Nilus de Matran, *Life003*, 2004, digital color print on Tyvek, 58" x 47", at Ampersand International Arts, San Francisco.

Candace Plummer Gaudiani and Nilus de Matran at Ampersand International Arts

I wish I could have been there for the opening reception—watched the crowds of drinking, laughing, talking people in front of the large-scale digital prints of the same. I wish I could have been there to look at and listen to real life act out Nilus de Matran's series *Life* as if the prints had spilled their contents and energy out into the gallery.

On the other hand, and in the other room, Candace Plummer Gaudiani's photographic installation moved me to a much quieter state of mind, and I was grateful for a quiet gallery. As if in a cathedral of communication, it was almost meditative as my eyes moved and rested rhythmically along her *Conversation* pieces.

I did not find the different bodies of work by de Matran and Gaudiani to be particularly related, other than their mutual success at disarming and dismantling documentary photography in terms of conception, composition and installation.

In his series, *Life*, de Matran seats us in a sea of social familiarity and symbolic ambiguity. Faces, silhouettes and fashions emerge from blurred, bright backgrounds. The viewer feels oddly part of and excluded from the scene all at once. The life-size scale and familiarity of the documented situations makes for porous picture planes and places for participation. But the lack of focus, the many unidentifiable people, objects and relationships also make us feel apart from the depicted reality; or, if we are at the

party, perhaps we have had too much to drink. Is that a man wearing a wig? And are those green evening gloves or is he/she about to operate?

The images are large, pixilated, with luminous objects and people in casual arrangements. The size and visual treatments of the objects makes them mysterious, and worthy of closer examination. But ultimately there seems to be nothing more to learn or gain or make clear, and



this is precisely the conclusion de Matran hoped we would reach. The viewer is reconciled to find that these images are products of chance, illuminated through an obscuring, brightly colored lens.

Gaudiani's portrait series, *Conversation*, consists of black-and-white photographs taken while the artists interviewed friends and acquaintances. The result of the incremental snapshooting is a contact sheet-like page that captures facial expressions, gestures and the subtleties of communication. At Ampersand, two of her *Conversation* subjects are

shown, one in five enlarged photographs and one illustrated in seven. Printed on highly textured paper, the photographs tend to look like pencil drawings, elegant and personal. One might expect the photographs in the installation to look like film stills or pages from a highly detailed flip-book, but they don't. There is a sense of narrative and progression to them, but it in no way drives the eye. In fact one of the greatest parts about these works is that your eye can skip around, further abstracting the intricate expressions and making them more like precious objects.

Where Gaudiani reveals the physical specifics of interaction, de Matran obscures them. Compressing the differences in an event, he pushes details of the experience to the surface, digitally altering color and focus so that they become visual patterns

describing a possible variety of experiences rather than documenting a specific moment in time. Neither of these shows the viewer some new way of looking at the physical structure of people and their interactions. Rather, they reveal subtleties and intricate arrangements that are present in daily life, slowed down, frozen, filtered and abstracted, so that we may examine and feel drawn into every pixilated detail and every shade of gray.

—Meredith Goldsmith

Candace Plummer Gaudiani: *Conversation* and Nilus de Matran: *Life* closed in June at Ampersand International Arts, San Francisco.

Meredith Goldsmith is a freelance writer based in San Francisco.

Larry Sultan at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

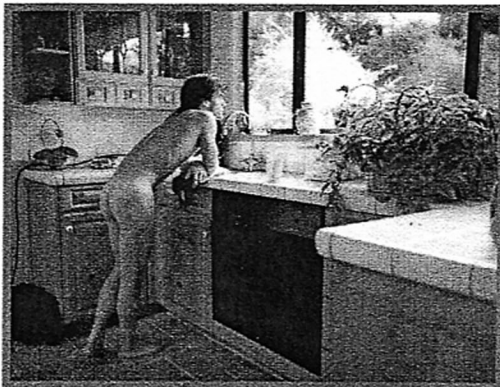
Sex is nostalgia for sex.

—Andy Warhol, 1975

Like Larry Sultan, I also spent my early adolescence in that exurb (sub) *par excellence* called San Fernando Valley, so it seems all but certain that we both felt the twinge of close-to-home familiarity when it was used as the location for

Paul Thomas Anderson's 1997 film, *Boogie Nights*. Of course, the characters in the Anderson film were of the fictional type, and their stories of rise and fall in the adult film industry seemed predictably fantastical as befits any good Hollywood narrative. But the important thing to remember was that the film's fiction was about a group of people who were themselves making another kind of fiction of the XXX variety, so we had an instance of a fiction about the making of fiction—and that in turn leads us to ask where the real boundary might be between real sexual expression and the pantomimed performances that we see in adult films. In an age when new medications for sexual enhancement are being advertised on prime-time TV, and when the Deleuzian gods of faking it until you finally make it are privileged as theoretic

Larry Sultan, *Topanga Skyline Drive #1*, 1999, chromogenic print, 40" x 50", at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.



cal touchstones, such a boundary may have ceased to exist.

Unlike Sultan, I almost never go back to the San Fernando Valley. Judging from his recent series of large chromogenic prints titled *The Valley*, he has been spending quite a bit of time there, finding artistic inspiration in the adult film industry that is famously centered in that region. Sultan's new photographs are a curious and sophisticated blend of documentary and fine art tropes that are usually focused on the goings on at the periphery of adult film production. For example, in *Havenhurst Drive* we see a couch and a ficus tree in an upscale living room earmarked by an ostentatious faux stone wall. In the left corner of this scene we see a glimpse of three figures engaged in sexual activity. But it is only a glimpse, and their cavorting seems both incidental and natural in this environment that itself seems a callow simulation of tastefulness.

In *Hamner Drive* the scene shifts to a bedroom in which three casually dressed men sit, their weary attention focused on some off-camera event. It is easy to guess that they are added production assistants who are waiting for a scene to wrap up so that they can begin to set up another one, their prominently featured watches