

## PATHETIC

by Cecilia Dougherty



The weekend before last I had the unfortunate disaster of attending the opening reception for an art show at UCLA called "Bad Girls", curated by self-appointed apologist for feminism Marcia Tanner. I have a video tape in the show, and several people I know have other types of work such as installation, painting, and objects. I have been a feminist since childhood. I've explored many issues over and over again. This show is an insult to the artists represented, and to women everywhere. Having to pay \$5 to park for our own reception (thanks, Judie) was the first insult. No, that's not even true. Not having been informed about the content of the exhibit or the intent of the curator of the exhibit that my work was to appear in was the first insult. Not being sent an announcement or invitations which I could give to friends, while women who had static work in the show were sent invites, was the second insult. The night before the opening I saw the press kit and had the opportunity to read the catalogue essays of the two curators, Marcia Tucker in NY and Tanner in LA. Tucker and Tanner make a pathetic comedy team.



In their essays, they had to explain using the term "girl" to refer to the women in the show. I will not consider the work of the men because it shouldn't even be there. They said that "girl" was "appropriated from Black English", and is a term of affection that African American women (they forgot to mention drag queens using it as a term of insult/affection to women/other drag queens) say to each other, such as "Oh, girl!" and "Hey, girl!" and simply "Girl!" This is bullshit. Right away you know that this show is by and about the honky experience, and the pathetic attempt that some white people make to relate African American experiences without ever leaving their own kind, which in the white mind comes down to slumming or voyeurism. Middle class white people try to borrow someone else's culture for cheap thrills, while never giving up privilege, while retaining the apparatuses of separation for their own entertainment. I've seen straight people slumming at gay clubs, practically ruining the atmosphere. And suburbanites shopping on Haight Street to get a quick safe look at the drug and runaway scene. Tanner and Tucker are the ones who live in the ghetto, and it's not a pretty picture.

The Tanner/Tucker ghetto doesn't know how to behave around real people living through real issues, so they put on a fiasco that touches no histories or lives. Further indication is found in Tucker's essay, where she states that feminism was originally (meaning 1970s) a movement of "white middle class formally educated heterosexual women". Women of that description were there, in fact, doing academic things, trying to decide if they look too much like lesbians when they don't wear make-up, if they should still fuck their boyfriends the normal way, if they should have careers or children, or if they should write a book and try to have it all. However, they were not the only ones around at the time. Lesbians were great theorists who actually put their ideas into practice, and worked hard in real ways to re-identify and reclaim womanhood and love. African American women had been feminists and courageous community organizers against the most brutal oppression for hundreds of years. Their ideas are helping reshape the color schemes, even though their white "sisters" racism gets in the way. Working class women have been fighting for issues of job safety, equal pay and opportunity, the right to work and bear

children, education, benefits and respect on the job since the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire. Formal education is not the sole domain of the white or the middle classes, and it is also no match for the education that comes from the School of Life. Native women did not need feminism until all those white educated people started invading and killing them. Asian women fight every day for power and recognition, and the struggle for a living wage has been a part of their history for decades. In San Francisco in the 70s the Mujeres Muralistas were creating exhilarating murals all over the Mission, successfully combining radical feminism and community pride. So why are these people forgotten, except in the appropriated term "girl"?

The rest of the catalog essays were inane and uninformed. The curators have not done their homework. Where is Rachel Rosenthal? Where are the collaborations? What happened to the idea, and the reality, of community? This work is presented within the structure of individual simultaneous acts of being "bad". It's pathetically trivializing to real struggles and real change.



One glaring omission from the catalog essays is in the area of video. What part of the video don't you understand? None of the videomakers in the show are mentioned in the essays. In fact, there is one sentence, out of about twenty pages, that said that a video presentation curated by Cheryl Dunye was part of this exhibit. There were no video stills sent out to the press (stills and slides of some



of the static work did go out to reviewers), the pathetic "Zine" which was produced for the show lists the "artists" on the first page, but leaves out all of the videomakers. They appear past the middle of the "Zine", in a little box at the bottom of the page.



The "Zine" it self would be funny if it weren't so pathetic. A quote from Ann Richards about Ginger Rogers appears across a dark and unreadable picture of Josephine Baker. A large photo of Marcia Tanner as a girl takes up most of page 14. The last page is an homage to the gallery-dealer-artist relationship. If an artist was not represented by a gallery, her chances for being considered for this show were very slim. The overriding concern for the curators is that the audience understand that being bad is related to a superficially aggressive femininity, like in women prison movies.



You know, cigarettes dangling, high heels, intense heterosexuality with the ever lurking threat of the straight girls' queer play (as opposed to lesbianism), black lingerie, swearing and bubble gum. What has any of this got to do with feminism? It relates to feminism in a way that subverts it and takes away its power, making it safe for the world.

The show itself looks like a trip to the K-Mart. It should be called K-M'Art, and then it could have real meaning and relationship to our lives. There are 65 artists in the LA show. Some artists have several pieces in the show and some have one piece only. The exhibition does not represent what the work might really mean to the person who made it. The meaning is actually camouflaged and co-opted to suit the curators intentions to render feminism harmless and a joke. The work is crammed in the space, which is why it looks so much like a discount department store.

This show is all about galleries and dealers, and selling artists. A lot of the work is salable because it is cute, exists as one-liners, refers to PMS rather than community struggle. It's about acting out, and as the catalog essays inform us, about "having fun". In fact Cyndi Lauper

is quoted in the essays, and you know what happened to her ridiculous career. The work is seriously lacking in intensity, depth and meaning beyond its commodification. The videotapes are hard to watch, art quality being sacrificed for cuteness value. Plus you have to stand in front of them for 45 minutes to see them. The video display is not conducive to being able to watch the work. The set up for screening is like this: you can see some of the work if you sit in front of a monitor on folding chairs underneath the stairs, or you can stand in front of the monitor set into one of the gallery walls and stare at the video like wallpaper.

The only good thing about the show is that when it's compared to the Mike Kelly disaster at the Whitney (Bad Boy bullshit), it completes the picture of a crisis that exists now in art making and art exhibition. I declare that I am not an artist, that I am a lesbian feminist, that separatism makes sense to me, that straight women have a lot to learn from lesbians, that education comes from everywhere, that a grass roots expression is a true expression and an academic one is a formulated mis-take, that I am a videomaker who loves videomaking and watching, that a woman is a woman and a

girl is a girl and both are wonderful and neither deserve to be trivialized or appropriated in the service of the status quo, that make-up and feminine propriety are not the issue, that Tanner and Tucker have created a pathetic art show.



## Amy Carter Arrested In Apartheid Protest

**PROVIDENCE, R.I., March 19 (AP)** — Fourteen college students, including Amy Carter, a freshman at Brown University, were arrested today in an anti-apartheid protest at a local office of the International Business Machines Corporation.

Providence police arrested the students about 30 minutes after they began a sit-in protesting the company's dealings in racially segregated South Africa. Specific charges were not immediately available.

The 18-year-old daughter of former President Jimmy Carter and the other protesters had said they would stay in the building either until they were arrested or until the company stops doing business with South Africa. The demonstrators included 13 Brown undergraduates and one University of Rhode Island student.

