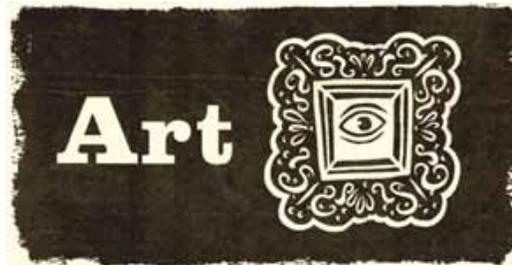


SF WEEKLY



See Me

The revealing yet mysterious photographs of Anne Deleporte

BY CARL NAGIN

From the official Web site of the Sigmund Freud Museum in Vienna comes this dizzying claim for a conceptual art show: "[It] offered the juncture of psychoanalysis and art a new surface for intervention." I don't know if French photographer Anne Deleporte would characterize her recent works, currently on view at the Marcel Sitcoske Gallery in SOMA, as conceptual or even psychoanalytic, but they certainly explore "surfaces"—particularly her series of self-portraits photographed from reflections in the glass exhibit cases for fetishes and artifacts in the Freud Museum. Deleporte's work is remarkable for the way it reveals the act of seeing, and for how it plays with the relation of painting to photography.

Deleporte's photos appeared outdoors a few years ago on some Market Street kiosks, as part of a public art project she designed for the French Consulate's "Côte Ouest" exhibit of emerging French artists. For that interactive installation, she painted a layer of whitewash over the glass panes covering her photos, then invited the public to scratch out graffiti and reveal the concealed images. The Marcel Sitcoske show marks her West Coast gallery debut and features three groups of digital photographs, "Spitting Images," the "Freud Series," and "Painted Concrete." (Since moving here from New York in 1998, Sitcoske has debuted a number of contemporary European and East Coast artists in their first West Coast shows.)

For "Spitting Images," Deleporte captured reflections on a transparent drop sheet suspended from the ceiling of an empty gallery littered with debris, and then photographed the sheet. The reflections resemble Phillip Guston caricatures. They appear as two female figures with distorted postures and animated gestures—some comic, some menacing. One of them is Deleporte, who had just arrived at a museum in the South of France to help her friend mount an

exhibit. The conceit here is that of *cinéma vérité*: The photos catch an unrehearsed pantomime of two artists interacting in a space where the work of one of them is about to become public—two women seemingly unaware of the images they cast against bare, concrete walls. In one group within this series, the women appear in silhouette, and their relationship is the focus of our attention. In a second group, Deleporte enters the gallery space like a shadow puppet, self-consciously introducing her artistic persona to the viewer. Her point of view becomes explicit commentary: I see you seeing yourself.

In a sense, then, the work is a meditation both on how photography transforms the subject, in this case the artist herself, and on how it can make the familiar strange. For some viewers, photography seems a more objective form of documentation than painting. Deleporte reminds us that in the creation of images the viewpoints of artist and observer are never erased, whatever the medium. Picasso liked to explain the problem this way: An American GI once complained to him about the distorted images of women in his cubist paintings. The artist responded by asking if his critic carried a photograph of his girlfriend. When the soldier proudly produced a wallet-size snapshot of his sweetheart, Picasso observed, "She's beautiful, but she's so small."

More recently, the objective authority of photography has been subverted by digital technology, which invites all manner of painterly "interventions," to borrow a phrase from Freudian cyberspace. Deleporte avoids the more heavy-handed of these effects, such as the overlays and multiple images Andreas Gursky manipulates in his current show at SFMOMA. Yet in her "Freud Series," Deleporte creates a delightful and subtle counterpoint between painterly portraiture and photography that doesn't rely on special effects. She "collected" her self-images (as Freud collected objects) from the glass surfaces of exhibits displayed in the Freud Museum. (Freud lived and worked in the building from 1891 until 1937, when the Nazis forced him into exile; today, the museum

houses, among other memorabilia, his collection of primitive and ancient art.)

Once again, we find ourselves in a museum space that's both psychological and aesthetic. In this series' works, Deleporte's reflection floats in a sensuous, red, Rothko-esque color field—the wallpaper that lined the exhibit cases. Her life-size self-portraits are printed on Tyvek, a polyethylene-fiber paper, and suggest a simplified, postmodernist version of a traditional Chinese vertical scroll. The photographer's own image is dramatically enhanced by the red background, with its whiff of Victorian parlor-room chinoiserie—a red that, on closer inspection, reveals pixelated blues, blacks, and yellows in horizontal bands that curve like the luxuriant fibers of rice paper or silk. To paraphrase Magritte, *Ceci n'est pas un rouge* (This is not a red).

Deleporte's illusionist likeness obscures the Freudian symbols in the exhibit cases; they remain, like the subconscious, mysterious. Freud, who fondly likened psychoanalysis to archaeology, would surely have recognized the artist's audacity as she salvages an image projected onto a transparent surface. The reflection has more reality for her than the real objects in the case. Deleporte is a spectral figure in these photographs, and



My Analyst, My Photographer: Anne Deleporte collected reflections of herself the way Freud collected objects.

The work is a meditation, in part, on how photography can make the familiar strange.

her gaze is ambiguous. Is she looking at us? At the erotic world of Freudiana? Or at herself as an artist? If these self-portraits have an objective dimension, it's deliberately elusive. They portray the reality of external surfaces (glass, wallpaper, reflections) as suggestively and ironically as they do inner worlds (hidden fetishes, the subconscious, the photographer). The background's horizontal bands nearly erase the contours and volume of the artist's appearance. Just as psychoanalysis peels away layers of the self, so the fuzziness of Deleporte's image

evokes a more primal vision of herself. Deleporte's work is as alive with color as it is intellectually charged and challenging. As she searches for self-awareness, she reminds us that photography is an act of seeing distinct from everyday looking. Seeing is intentional, and by paying closer attention to surfaces, we can learn to see more deeply within.

In both content and technique, Deleporte's work presents a sharp contrast to the Gursky retrospective at SFMOMA, two blocks from the Marcel Sitcoske Gallery. Although each artist works in the medium of digital photography, Gursky's photos are epic depictions of public places, in which human individuality seems doomed by oppressive architectural structures that dictate behavioral norms and patterns. Even his rock concerts resemble Nazi rallies. Deleporte's show is worth the walk from SFMOMA: Sitcoske's gallery will be your recovery room. Her vision is intimate and lyrical without being sentimental. Even in her more abstract work, such as the color field series "Painted Concrete," photographed in a public park in Rio de Janeiro, she invites the viewer to contemplate the vibrant colors and playful oscillations of contour and depth. Deleporte accents the park's abstract forms like patterns in a Persian miniature. She gives them a human scale by returning us to inner spaces and to the mysteries of perception itself. ●