

## ***The Well-Appointed Garage*** ***"Emerge" 2001***

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**As** I walk into the 2001 GenArt San Francisco "Emerge" exhibition, almost the first object which hits my eye is a brand-new, bright red Mercedes-Benz sedan, displayed in a niche that in former years had been given over to actual art. For about a tenth of a second I am, perhaps pardonably, fooled, given that during one recent visit to an MFA show I encountered a used motorcycle with a "For Sale" sign on it, no doubt a raw portrayal of the economic desperation of the young artist. This Mercedes installation has no edge of irony as an excuse; it just looks cluelessly inappropriate. But if Mercedes-Benz paid for some decent wine at the opening, and people in uniforms to refill the glasses, hooray for them. Emerging artists can use all the support they can get....

One thing I notice is the wide range of apparent Attitude Factor among the artists. In general, the less arrogant the attitude, the more powerful the work. Three quilts by Anna Von Mertens have me calculating whether I could possibly beg, borrow or steal the \$2800 apiece, and wondering which one I'd choose...These quilts, excuse me, are works of Art; hand-dyed in precise, subtle colors, hand-stitched in patterns of topographic maps, circuit diagrams, and bird migration patterns, each one a piece of sheer poetry. Can you imagine sleeping under "Western Sky/ The Sky Color of Los Angeles, San Francisco and Seattle at 4:00 PM, October 23-29, 2000," or "Night Sky/ Bird Migration Patterns of North America"? Owning a quilt like this could bring one closer to the harmonies of the universe...

**Another compelling project is the photo essay by L. Jessamyn Lovell, who frankly documents the struggles of her own family; an absent father, a diabetic, bedridden mother, a brother with disfiguring burn scars, and a sister who appears to have mentally checked out of the chaos around her. You can almost tune in to the noise and sniff the squalor of poverty and frustration. Her attitude, however, is one of patient observation and acceptance, devoid of rancor or disgust. She writes, "I think about my mother in her bed day after day and it keeps my spirit alive knowing that I am doing what I know how to do in response to the situation. I would not be alive if I did not make art. I would have given up a long time ago...[they] understand that I am not trying to exploit them. They understand that it brings us closer together." The overarching message is one of the ferocity of the human spirit despite overwhelming circumstances.**

Liz Cohen's contrasting photographs of two Panamanian residences, the vibrant crash pad of a transsexual sex worker and the splendid but sterile high-rise apartment of her grandmother, are a study in both economics and personality. "These two homes are less than two miles apart, but a world away from one another," she says. The work does not invite obvious political generalizations; the grandmother's palace may be sybaritic and overstuffed, but the sex worker's shack, with its rows of fancy shoes and gay altar to the Virgin, looks a lot more interesting.

GenArtSF's mission "is to strengthen and empower young artists, to cultivate a new generation of art audiences, and to connect the arts community to the community at large." Given the packed nature of "Emerge" openings, I'd say they are doing a fine job...

*"Emerge" 2001, sponsored by GenArtSF, featured Michael Arcega, Megan Cump, Rick Danielson, Jennifer Fiore, Justin Hunter, Kirsten Bahrs Janssen, L. Jessamyn Lovell, Rajkamal Kaur Kahlon, Carrie Leeb, Deth Sun, Abner Nolan, Brett Simon, Anna Von Mertens, Daniel Ross, and Liz Cohen. Jurors were J.D. Beltran, artist; Berin Golonu, Editor-in-Chief of Artweek magazine; Rupert Jenkins, Director, SF Arts Commission Gallery; and N. Trisha Lagaso, Executive Director, Southern Exposure. Exhibited in the San Francisco Art Institute graduate studio garage space, 701 Chestnut, 7-18 through 8-5, 2001.*

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