

Art in America

March 1998



Tam Ochiai: *Theorem*, 1997, mixed mediums on linen, 30 by 24 inches; at Team.

Tam Ochiai at Team

Judging from the evidence of this exhibition, Tam Ochiai would like to be one or all of the following: 1) an artist exhibiting at Mary Boone Gallery; 2) the lead guitarist for a testosterone-fueled rock 'n' roll band; 3) the female star of European films, preferably of French New Wave vintage.

A video monitor featuring a close-up of Ron Warren's face greeted you just inside the door of Ochiai's exhibition. Warren is the man who has for some years manned the front desk of Mary Boone Gallery. In the video he is busy on the phone and does not acknowledge your presence, but his image lent some up-scale flair to the ramp that descends into Team Gallery's basement location. The music you heard was a compilation of hard-driving guitar solos by a quick succession of rock 'n' roll studs pictured on another video monitor, this one placed on the floor of the main gallery. A keyboard hooked into an amplifier extended a somewhat disingenuous invitation to join in. The cuts between guitarists occur too rapidly for anyone to keep up.

On the gallery walls were close to 100 small white paint-

ings featuring delicately drawn female figures, representatives of the gamine school of European movie star, identified sometimes by name but most often by their films—*Stolen Kisses*, *Zazie dans le metro*, *Le Genou de Claire*, *L'histoire d'Adele H*, etc. Ochiai gives his women almost pitifully thin arms and legs, and the light coat of paint that describes their dresses and their large, expressive eyes is usually the most substantial element in the paintings. But if he depicts these women as vulnerable, he also gives them a form of hidden strength. For many of his stars, he replaces the tops of their heads with lightly sketched cat ears, suggesting that they are perhaps familiar spirits. In whose employ we can only speculate.

Ochiai splits his time between Yokohama and New York, and his work seems to record obsessions with certain elements of Western culture and an attempt, through representation, to magically absorb the objects of his zeal. Yet he shows no interest in attempting to integrate these preoccupations into a unified image. Male and female components are strictly segregated, and the peculiar strength of this work—and this work is nothing if not peculiar—lies in the almost painful sense of distance implied both between the rockers and the waifs, and between the images and the sensibility that has imagined them.

—Charles Dee Mitchell