

Time Out

New York

Tam Ochiai

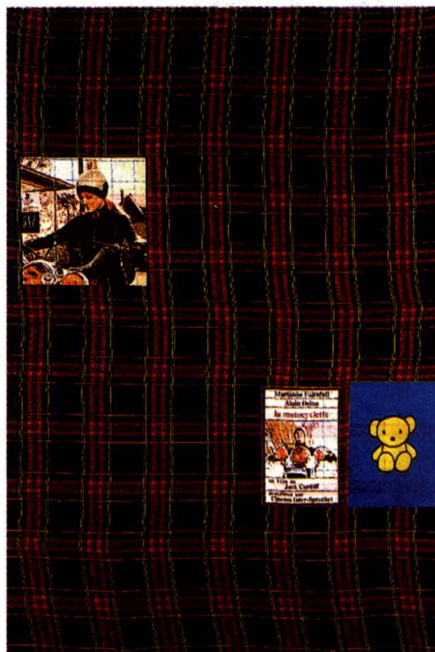
Team Gallery, through Sat 1
(see Chelsea).

There are works of art that are flagrantly macho (Richard Serra's mammoth sculpture comes to mind), and there are pieces that are expressly feminine (any fabric work that is an homage to sewing, for instance). But usually I don't make assumptions about an artist's gender—and that's why I was so embarrassed when I strolled in to see Tam Ochiai's paintings and video at Team Gallery and asked a few questions about "her" work. As I soon learned, Tam is a "he."

I'm not the only one who's made this mistake, though it's easy to see why it happens. Like Karen Kilimnik and Vanessa Beecroft, Ochiai's work is often filled with images of waiflike child-women. Whereas Kilimnik and Beecroft use female pop icons toward specifically ironic or critical ends, Ochiai's paintings are more like modern-day Brueghels: slices of the pop-cultural landscape full of references instead of people.

Ochiai draws on such diverse sources as New Wave cinema, fashion and advertising; in the process of conflating these worlds, he compounds their common penchant for glamour. His work looks like that of a passive receiver of cultural imagery—a sponge or satellite dish that not only soaks up what's out there, but engages in a bit of pop-archeology as well.

At times, Ochiai's work seems just plain stupid—a phrase in one of his paintings reads "The Velvet Underground & Nico eat Fresh Bufferin / The



Tam Ochiai, *La Motorcyclette*, 1997.

Chelsea girls kiss Dracula." Yet for all of his vapidness, Ochiai successfully sets himself up as a neutral observer à la Warhol; his pairings of seemingly disparate images—and even sounds, as in the installation mixing rock guitar solos with electronic dance music—are equally effortless and savvy.

Cross-pollinating different aspects of contemporary culture, Ochiai is a sort of worker bee flitting from image to image: a multi-culti, multi-gendered sensibility that picks and chooses from the inchoate mass of media iconography—and forces the rest of us to figure out the results.—*Martha Schwendener*