



Still from *Papal Broken Dance* (2009) by Marie Losier

Santa Barbara Contemporary Arts Forum

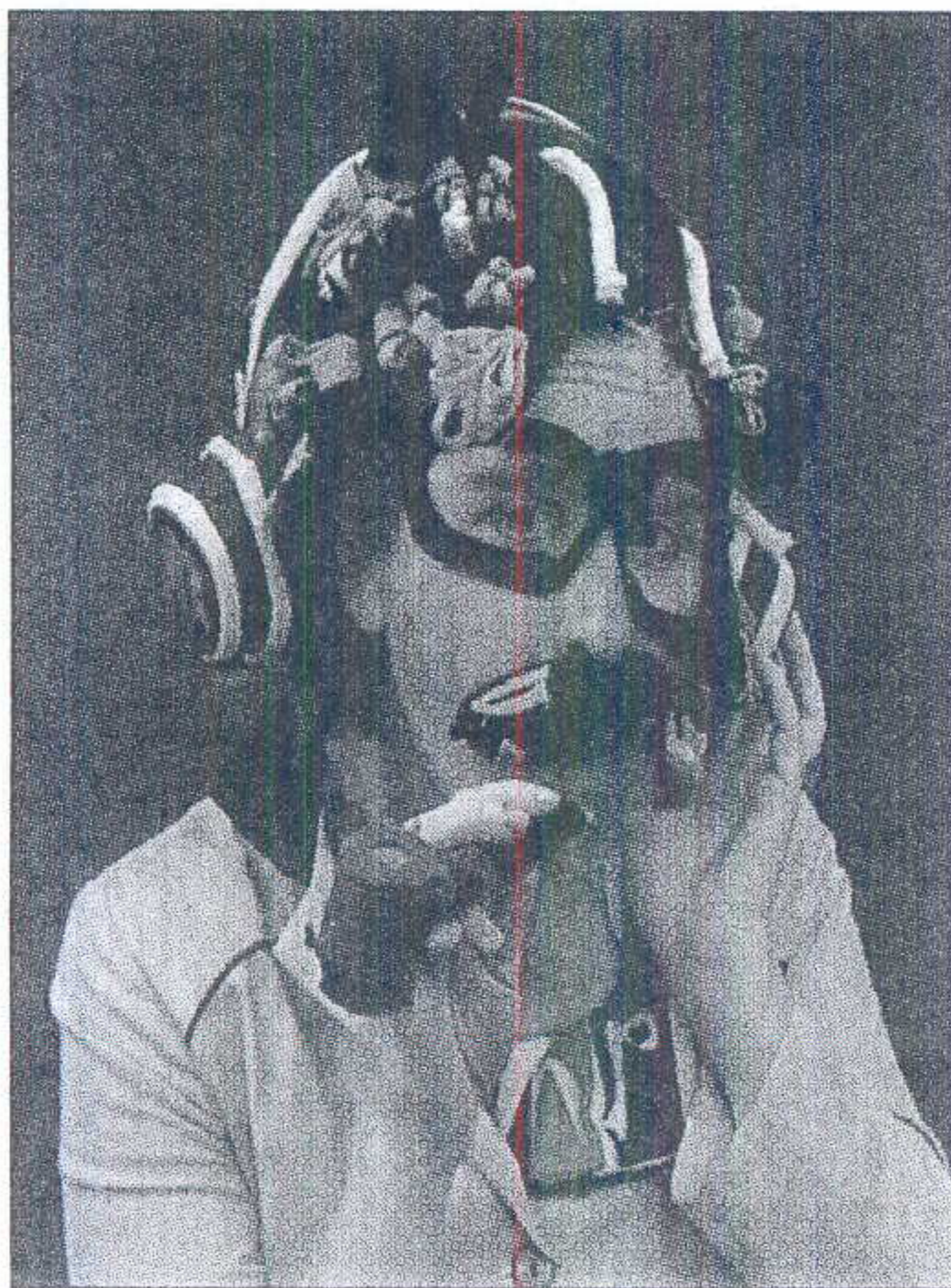
Our Unusual Behavior

By ERIN J. SMITH / CASA

WITH ALL THE ZANY FLAIR OF THE CARNIVALESQUE, a group of eleven performance-based video artists expose and poke fun at our deep-seated fears in *Unusual Behavior*, on view at the Santa Barbara Contemporary Arts Forum through January 17th.

"There's a playful silliness that comes across in the work, but there's an underlying seriousness to it as well," said Heather Jenó Silva, curator. "These artists draw on the ideology of the Theatre of the Absurd, a style of mid-20th century theatre in which realism is dismissed through absurd plots and nonsensical dialogue, reminding us that life is inherently illogical."

Silva, an independent art critic and curator, is currently the Programming, Contracts, and Grants Analyst for UCSB Arts & Lectures. She also serves as the curator of CAF's award-winning Forum Lounge performance art series. "I have a vested interest in performance art, so it was a natural leap to performance-based video art," said Silva, who holds a Masters in Art History and Museum Studies from the University of Southern California. "As a curator, you get to play God. You're the one who has the ultimate control of the content and how it's viewed. I have a very definite order of how I want viewers to experience the work. It's like being a scholar who guides a person through a thought process, but what I love about curating is the visual component in imparting the information."



Left panel still (detail) from *Car Talk* (2008) by Julie Lequin

The show features the ground-breaking work of artists Tamy Ben-Tor, Harry Dodge and Stanya Kahn, Julie Lequin, Kalup Linzy, Marie Losier, Dave McKenzie, Julie Orser, Catherine Ross, Catherine Sullivan, and Marnie Weber.

Using over-the-top props, often rudimentary film techniques, and the most important component – themselves – these emerging to mid-career artists turn familiar societal conventions on their heads. "By inventing eccentric characters, re-appropriating pop cultural imagery, and creating outlandish scenarios, these artists tap into the American unconscious and expose the underlying dehumanization, fears, and taboos of our society," said Silva. Many of the videos are non-linear in narrative, so a viewer can jump right in and enjoy. Those that do carry a story line are shorter and repeat from start to finish more often. "Visual art has a way of bringing up questions

without answers," said Silva. "But the most important thing is that art makes us think. Ultimately, any reaction is important. The worst response would be antipathy."

In addition to *Unusual Behavior*, recent work by CAF-commissioned artist Mitchell Wright is on display through January 17th. *The Reconstruction*, Wright's body of work inspired by William Faulkner's short story, "Barn Burning" (1939), appears as part of CAF's series of Bloom Projects.

CAF is located at 653 Paseo Nuevo, upstairs at the Paseo Nuevo mall. Hours are 11-5pm, Tues through Sat, and 12-5pm, Sun. For more information, call 966-5373 or visit www.sbcaf.org.

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