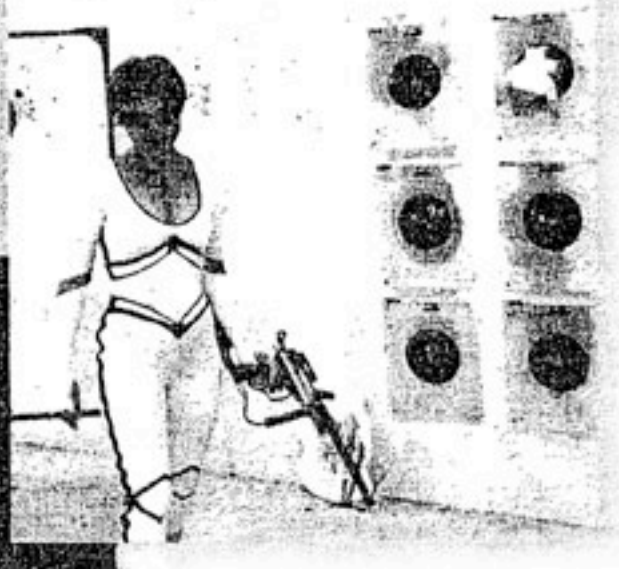


Michelle Handelman explores her larger-than-life fantasies in two simultaneous shows at the Catharine Clark Gallery and the Lab.



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Girl on Film

Performer, filmmaker, and visual artist **Michelle Handelman** may be remembered locally for *BloodSisters*, an award-winning documentary about the local lesbian S/M subculture that played at over 50 film festivals. But the movie wasn't exactly a blockbuster, so the S.F. Art Institute graduate moved to New York in 1999. Since then, she's produced a stimulating body of work about feminine desire, which includes the series *Cannibal Garden*, a lively mix of photography, sculpture, and videos that depict Handelman, nude and crawling around, eating candy off the floor and baby-talking to the camera. Though her tactics are less attention-grabbing in "Trans>portal: New Work by Michelle Handelman," on display at the Catharine Clark Gallery, her new pieces are far from bland.

Like most performance artists, Handelman uses her body as her instrument. Citing influences from Baudelaire and absurdist theater to science-fiction films and fairy tales, she toys in her videos with themes of escape and entrapment. "I work very intuitively," she says over the telephone. "I figure out exactly what I'm saying after the fact." Despite the nebulous goal, her elaborate fantasy worlds are clear. "On a psychological level," she explains, "it's about trying to escape out of the camera, but also talking to the camera."

The video *Jump*, for example, is a

version of the Sisyphus myth, in which Handelman flees down a long corridor until she is obscured (or as she puts it, "obliterated") by a bright light. In *I Exist in a Highly Excited State of Over-Stimulation*, she repeats the title—a line from the David Cronenberg film *Videodrome*—while whipping herself into a frenzy. Again, Handelman disappears on screen. "I wipe myself out," she says, "so my face becomes a blur." Similarly, *Sew Me In, Sew Me Out* shows Handelman, over the course of an hour, weaving a web over the lens until she's no longer visible.

While her new work is noticeably more somber than her previous celluloid trysts, Handelman's imagination still takes flight. In "The Adventures of LuckyM: AIM," a weeklong live installation at the Lab, she takes on the alter ego of a "malleable, Spider-Woman-like superhero." Inspired by the work of French artist Nikki de St. Phalle, *Adventures* is a two-part piece in which Handelman acts as both agent and subject. In it, she'll be filmed as she works, adding new layers of a soy-based paint onto a piece that will change over the course of the week, while videos from the previous day's painting appear on the wall behind her. The climax is a live "shootout," during which guests from the local art scene will be invited to shoot paint guns at canvases. — Lisa Ham

"The Adventures of LuckyM: AIM" opens Friday, April 12, with a reception from 6 to 9 p.m. and runs through April 20 at the Lab, 2948 18th St. (at Capp), S.F. Admission is free; call 864-8855. The shootout takes place Thursday, April 18, at 8 p.m., also at the Lab (85-10). "Trans>portal" is on display through April 27 at the Catharine Clark Gallery, 49 Geary (at Kearny), S.F. Admission is free; call 399-1439 or visit www.cclarkgallery.com.

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MICHELLE HANDELMAN

“This Delicate Monster” out for a country stroll.

Pretty, Ugly

The meaning of Michelle Handelman’s exhibit **“This Delicate Monster”** might be difficult to penetrate —

ONGOING
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it’s billed as a pop fable inspired by Charles Baudelaire’s *The Flowers of Evil*, which is no simple text — but not to worry: There’s plenty to stimulate your

senses on opening night. First come the video screens, featuring vignettes of fetish-garbed, lithe bodies frolicking in nature, sometimes disgustingly. Then there are the performers, similarly lithe, seated in chairs high on the gallery walls, who will laugh at you, taunt you, and generally freak you out. If the whole thing makes you alternatingly pissed and confused and hot and bothered, the artist has done her job. The opening-night performance starts at 6 p.m. Thursday (and the exhibit continues through Oct. 29) at the Rx Gallery, 132 Eddy (at Mason), S.F. Admission is free; call 474-7973 or visit www.rxgallery.com. — **Michael Leaverton**