

School 'Test' Gets Top Score

Everyone who ever suspected as a child that the adults running the school had a twisted agenda will appreciate "The Adventures of Blacky," the collaborative video installation by Bay Area artists Jeanne Finley and John Muse at Sweetow.

Projected on one wall of a darkened room is a series of slides. A visually gripping video plays on the adjacent wall. At the center of the room is a seatless wooden chair, its legs partially lopped off, sunk in a pile of pencil sharpener shavings.

The pencil and handheld sharpener appear early in the sequence of slides, which illustrates questionnaire forms from a psychological test devised in the 1950s by one Gerald Blum, Ph.D.

"The Adventures of Blacky," as the video explains,

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TEST PATTERNS

"THE ADVENTURES OF BLACKY": Jeanne Finley and John Muse's collaborative installation of video and objects. Through October 31 at Patricia Sweetow Gallery, 49 Geary St., San Francisco. (415) 788-5126.

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What Does This Dog Remind You of?

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is the story of a cartoon family of white dogs whose one black member is a young female named Blacky. The tests poses questions about scenes of their interaction.

The 8½-minute video begins with the camera inside a crude dollhouse crowded with miniature toys and full-size household objects. As the view through the dollhouse window blurs and the objects inside pitch and spill, we sense that dollhouse and camera are spinning in space: a simple, forceful evocation of childhood emotional vertigo.

When it switches to documentary style, the video shows an epicene girl being given the "Blacky" test by a faceless woman.

Both video and slides offer glimpses of the interviewer's script and the Freudian jargon by which the child's responses are to be sorted. Terms such as "oral sadism" and "anal compulsiveness" breeze by. Even before we notice them, we sense that traps are being set. The interviewer's reassurance that there are no right or wrong answers is the first sign.

The loaded character of the cartoons — Blacky chewing up her mother's collar, licking herself, watching a helpless sibling's tail about to be severed — and of the questions asked about them is obvious.

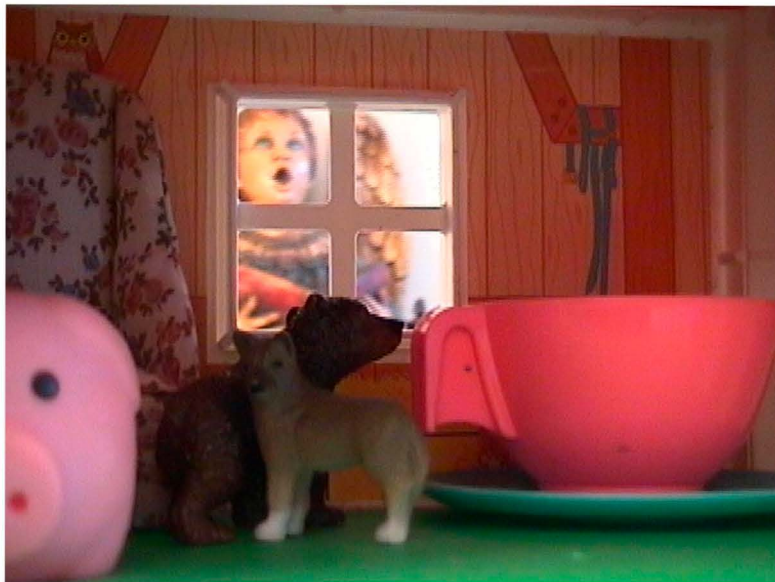
The mute child's responses register in symbols more visceral than Freudian: the growing pile of pencil shavings at her elbow, sunlight fo-

cused by a lens burning a hole through a cartoon, the test's flash cards stacked into a house and then toppled.

The psychological pressure of the test situation is heightened by a low, brooding soundtrack of electronic music and by the interviewer's clinically even, disengaged voice.

The remainder of the show is objects — elegant mirrored and etched glass frames of image and text, color photocopies stitched into house shapes — that seem merely like souvenirs of the brilliantly composed video piece.

Anachronistic as the style of the "Blacky" test is, the sense of entrapment it generates seems up-to-the-minute.



The video installation "The Adventures of Blacky" presents a psychological test about a cartoon family of dogs.