

Galleries swept by winter flood of first-rate work

*John Sanborn sets video to music;
Chris Burden hauls out the artillery*

By Hunter Drohojowska

During three weeks of holidays, the spirit of high art is supplanted by high spirit at cocktail parties. Few are immune, and few mind very much. Meanwhile, exhibitions linger in the galleries like unwanted merchandise and critics strain to find a show to review.

But they strain no longer, for the galleries will be frenetically active this weekend with a flood of first-rate art to rival any period since as far back as last Labor Day. In fact, there's practically too much to see. Thus the following guide to what looks to be the most promising of the new shows:

■ **UC SANTA BARBARA, UNIVERSITY ART MUSEUM:** "Eve Sonneman: Photography, 1968-1982" and "Christopher Wilmarth: 'Breath'" — This double bill is strangely complementary. Both artists embrace an austere beauty, but Wilmarth's interpretations are as sensual as Sonneman's are intellectual.

In his series of etchings, drawings and blown-glass and steel sculptures titled "Breath," Wilmarth attempts to create visual equivalents of Stephane Mallarme's poetry. For instance, a poem beginning "Insert myself within your story . . ." inspires the placement of an ovoid glass form between the leaves of a book-like support, while the smoky auras of Wilmarth's drawings and aquatints mean to convey the poet's internal world of reverie.

Critic Hilton Kramer has described Wilmarth as having "one of the most original sculptural styles to emerge in the 1970s."

Eve Sonneman, an internationally known New York photographer, achieved critical acclaim in the late 1960s and 1970s by pairing images, in black-and-white or color, to evoke the passage of time, memory and dislocation. This was done by photographing the same subject twice, from slightly altered perspectives, to create a tension between the two frames — a subtle implication of cinematic narration. In the '80s, Sonneman has focused less on figures, concentrating instead on objects while emphasizing planes of vision in order to examine the dichotomy between nature and culture (such as in her mated images of an evening moon and a truckstop).

In the context of her medium, Sonneman's photographs represent a departure from the earlier "decisive moment" approach, where all elements of a situation come together in a single perfect image, exemplified by Henri Cartier-Bresson.

The Sonneman exhibition was organized by art critic Bruce Kurtz. Both shows continue through Feb. 5.

For more information call: (805) 961-3013 or 961-2951.

■ **CIRRUS GALLERY:** "Is this a natural world?" organized by Eve Sonneman — Sonneman asked that compelling question of friends who are artists and writers, many of them avant-garde and post-avant-garde heavies. Opening tomorrow is an exhibition of their responses. The "suitcase-sized" submissions come from: Paolo Columbo, Edit deAk, Jeffrey Deitch, Bryan Hunt, Klaus Kertess, Sol Lewitt, Mary Ellen Mark, Robert Rauschenberg, Joyce Robbins, David Salle, Tomiyo Sasaki, Michael Smith, Larry Williams, Ed Wortz, Melinda Wortz and Robert Yucikas. There will probably be a lot of reading required, so come prepared to stand. For more information call: 680-3473.

■ **L.A.C.E.:** "John Sanborn: A Video Panorama" — Video art occasionally makes the transition from the context of the gallery to the real world of broadcasting, and John Sanborn's art has accomplished this. In it, he integrates video with music and his impressive credentials include "The Twyla Sharp Scrapbook," an elegant history of that choreographer's work; projects with composer Philip Glass, including "A Gentlemen's Honor" and "Act III"; and a "Tribute to Nam June Paik." These and other works are included in the exhibition through Feb. 11. Tomorrow night, at 8 p.m., Sanborn will be back in the gallery for a screening of selections from the exhibition, some episodes from Robert Ashley's epic television opera "Perfect Lives," which he directed, as well as new works. The admission is \$5, \$3 to L.A.C.E. members. For more information call: 620-0104.

■ **NEWPORT HARBOR ART MUSEUM:** "Still Life: Hollywood Tableaux Photography" and **LAGUNA BEACH MUSEUM OF ART:** "Anxious Interiors"

— It's the dilemma of the '80s. Which is the more aesthetic? The work of Hollywood hacks or art school graduates? You can be the judge as of tomorrow. Newport's current exhibition of anonymous publicity and film stills finds a curious counterpoint in Laguna's exhibition of tableau sculpture and directorial photography, done by artists who borrow from the stilted illustrational look. Contenders in the LBMA show include artist-photographers Harry Bowers, Ellen Brooks, Jo Ann Callis, Eileen Cowin, John Divola, Bernard Faucon, Ralph Gibson, Les Krims, Duane Michals, Lucas Samaras, Cindy Sherman and Sandy Skogland.

See both exhibitions in one day to compare and contrast.

Organized by Elaine K. Dines, the Laguna show continues through Feb. 19. For more information call: (714) 494-6531. The Newport show ends Feb. 5; call (714) 759-1122.

Opening receptions this weekend include:

■ **ROSAMUND FELSEN GALLERY:** "Chris Burden: 6 Warships, Some Lucky Subs, The Frictionless Sled, The Speed of Light Machine, Cost Effective Micro Weaponry That Work" — The *enfant terrible* of L.A. has matured, and so have his playthings. The latest exhibition of his personalized war toys promises to be amusingly malevolent; it opens tomorrow, with a reception from 3 to 5 p.m., and continues through Feb. 4. For more information call: 652-9172.

■ **JANUS GALLERY:** "David Bungay: Animal and Mountain Paintings" —

Though he follows a more idyllic path of inspiration than Burden, Bungay is unlikely to approach the sentiment of John Denver's "Rocky Mountain High" — if the painter's 1983 show is any indication. Bungay's weird juxtapositions of unconventional surfaces and semi-abstract, semi-conventional rendering indicate he's trying, at times successfully, to hew an honest expression out of clichéd nature painting. The show opens with a reception tonight from 7 to 10 p.m., and continues through Jan. 29. For more information call: 658-6084.

■ **ASHER/FAURE GALLERY:** "Viola Frey" — Frey's most recent work includes oversize figures in ceramic and smaller pieces in bronze. These figures, painted with expressionist exuberance, have a slightly sinister aspect. The show also includes her ceramic plates and oil paintings, through Feb. 4. For more information call: 271-3665.

■ **NEIL G. OVSEY GALLERY:** "Eric Orr" — Fountains, painterly wall pieces and a new installation are the latest contributions by Orr. The artist is best known for his light-and-space oriented sculpture. The show opens tomorrow with a reception from 3 to 5 p.m. and continues through Feb. 11. For more information call: 617-1351.

■ **KARL BORNSTEIN GALLERY:** "Steve Danko" — Danko's manipulated photographs have gone one step further in the "Mithras Series," images on photo-sensitive linen combined with brash strokes of paint. The show opens tomorrow with a reception from 2:30 to 5 p.m., and continues through Jan. 28. For more information call: 450-1129.

■ **AAA ART-MICHAEL SALERNO GALLERY:** "Kim Jones" — This artist is best known for his performance work as the character "Mudman," when he is covered with mud and sticks to act out personal rituals. Sculptures and drawings from this series will be exhibited. The opening reception is Sunday from 3 to 6 p.m., and it continues through Jan. 31. For more information call: 620-1897.

■ **OTIS ART INSTITUTE OF PARSONS SCHOOL OF DESIGN:** "California Bookworks: The Last Five Years" and "Il Modo Italiano: Alik Cavaliere" — The practice of books made and produced by artists has quite a heritage in Southern California. This exhibition features some 150 artists who've created unique or limited edition books ranging from traditional fine printing, book-objects and serial structures to offset and photocopy work. It was organized by an authority, Joan Hugo, who began the Artists' Books Archive when she was working in the library of the county-supported Otis Art Institute.

Many fragile artists' books from the 1960s and 1970s were preserved in the archive and a few will be on view, including those by John Baldessari, William Burroughs, Jim Dine, David Hockney, and Marshall McLuhan.

Also debuting is "Il Modo Italiano," a citywide extravaganza of Italian contemporary art featuring a site-specific installation by Cavaliere. The installation was arranged around the cryptic theme "From the everyday to the museum. From the absolute to the everyday."