

more**ART**

faster

by Bana Witt



Nearly glad to be feeling the slight chill of autumn, thinking of fuzzy sweaters and finding easy parking, I begin this day's search for meaning or entertainment at Flax, an arts supply store at Val and Market that's currently exhibiting some photography. In the far back right of the building, running through the end of November, is the work of Tim Baskerville. It's a collection of gelatin and

Downtown death camps, cities in the sea

solarized gelatin black-and-white prints of the vintage cable cars on the new F Market line that runs to Castro Street (the guys call it the "fruit loop"). The angles are hard and the wood is worn. No people inhabit these cars, and this method of photography enhances the coldness of the metals, pushing these interior images past the realm of real.

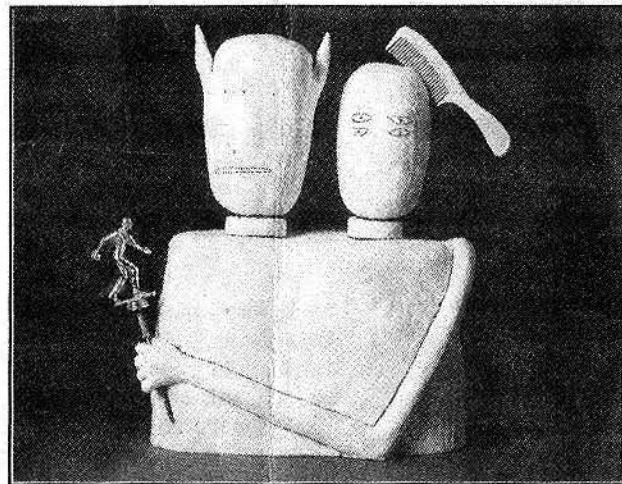
An installation called "At the Gate," next to the Arts Commission Gallery (155 Grove St.), is frightening, depressing and thought-evoking. Created by the art team of Ian Pollock and Janet Silk, it runs through Nov. 9. It's essentially an excavated lot with small tarp tents pitched haphazardly about, the name of a country and the number of its refugees stenciled on the sides of each. There are copies of an informational handout on the fence, and an "audio installation" number you can call at any hour (522-0605). Both state the huge numbers of displaced persons, the politics involved and quote Heinrich Boll as saying, "The 20th century is the century of refugees and prisoners." In a brutal irony, this installation is only a few blocks from the AIDS vigil/encampment on U.N. Plaza.

The window next door at the Arts Commission Gallery displays the con-

tents of a time capsule that had been buried in 1990 and already dug up. Aren't they in a bit of a rush? The box they buried is definitely the best part, a 2-foot cube of well-aged copper. It contains mostly paper products and typed pieces, including a Kathy Acker book (when will I find the time to read that?) and a postcard that reads, "Jesse Helms has penis envy." Maybe 1990 was a slow year.

Kenneth Leaf's display at Mad Magda's goes well with the At the Gate exhibit, though more ethereal. Photos are printed on what appear to be handmade paper allowed to curl at the corners, creating a shelter for beautiful faces and heads wearing hoods and headdresses. They are pagan, fragile, displaced and otherworldly. A fortune teller at the entrance is giving a man a reading in a loud voice I would find embarrassing. Further into the cafe is a light well, usually used to display an art piece. Currently it's in a state of transition, with a collaged mannequin lying in a state of disassemblage.

Two very different artists are now displaying their work at the Bucheon Gallery, 355 Hayes St., through Nov. 29. The paintings of Olive Ayhens depict nature in a very unusual way, integrating several types of painting at once. One is expansive, with serene green hills, lots of



Bucheon Gallery at 355 Hayes is currently featuring sculptures by Melissa Stern.

water and snow; another displays gnarled and layered paint like skeletons and driftwood. There are wild and frothy river rapids, colored stone beaches and spindly, multicolored plants surrounding animals and isolated humans. One canvas is a set of nuclear-reactor cones with an amusement park constructed in their midst. Another is a woman swimming with a bear. One has a city floating in the sea. These pieces are dramatically imaginative, natural in theme, not possible in nature. Each canvas is deserving of a long and contemplative study. Maybe everything manmade is ultimately natural.

The sculptures of Melissa Stern are strange and humorous, almost 3-D animation. They're mostly busts and heads of an odd simplicity in ceramic, with a board balanced on one, a hat made of a vinyl record on another and a few topped with crowns. One head has a comb stuck deeply in its skull while holding the top of a bowling trophy in its single noodle-like arm. The shapes are smooth, and some are arbitrarily devoid of mouths or noses. Definitely a show worth catching.

As I go outside I wonder where the hell I stored my sweaters.