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ART IN REVIEW

'Incantations'

Metro Pictures
519 West 24th Street, Chelsea
Through July 30

A braided thread of quasi-mystical belief and ironic skepticism runs through a lot of contemporary art. It is what connects the works of eight artists in "Incantations," an entertaining exhibition organized by Nicelle Beauchene and Kent Henriksen.

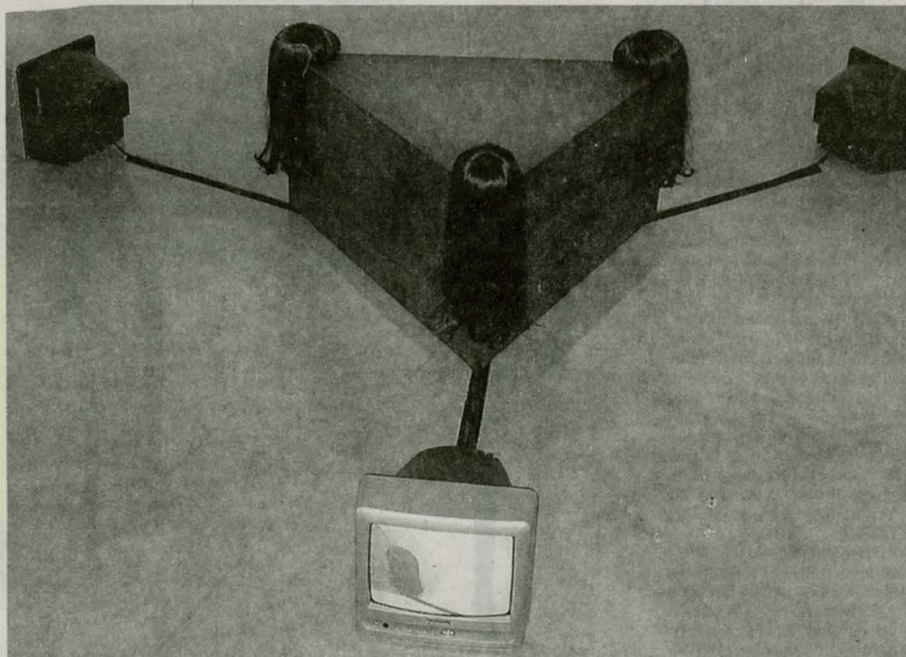
The show's most gripping work, a "Dr. Who"-like assemblage by John Espinosa, features a three-sided minimalist sculpture with a woman's long-haired wig hanging from each corner. A small television near each corner erratically broadcasts black-and-white images of the central sculpture. With futuristic sound effects, interruptions of static and a wildly zooming camera, Mr. Espinosa's work is at once comically ridiculous and magically enthralling.

Christian Holstad's small, surrealist pictures also blend fact and fantasy to hair-raising effect. Each is a newspaper photograph partly erased and redrawn by the artist so that ghostly, possibly malevolent figures emerge from behind the degraded facade of public imagery.

Modernism's romance with presumably more primitive and therefore more soulful states of human evolution is affirmed and spoofed by Olaf Breuning's photographic portraits of himself and three cohorts in gorilla outfits and as painted and masked jungle savages; by Justin Samson's mysterious, museumlike display of Northwest Indian-style woven artifacts; and by Keegan McHargue's faux-Outsider painting and etchings.

Mike Kelley's voodoo-style assemblage centered around a skull in a bucket. Liz Craft's kitschy wooden chest loaded with bones and Cindy Sherman's self-portrait with plastic ants crawling over her face and hair also contribute to this fruitful conversation about the allure of the irrational in modern culture.

KEN JOHNSON



John Espinosa's "Zeta" (2004) in the exhibition "Incantations" at Metro Pictures in Chelsea.

Metro Pictures Gal