

## "Pan/Sonic"

NIU Art Museum, Chicago Gallery, through Sat 17.



The group show "Pan/Sonic" sets out to examine how the Information Age has shaped Americans' "understanding of identity, race, ethnicity and self," and does so with mixed results.

Rashid Johnson's *Me, Tavis Smiley and Shea Butter*, a video in which Johnson slathers himself up with shea butter while listening to the *Tavis Smiley* show, fits nicely into the theme but has the subtlety of a sledgehammer. On the other hand, you'll beg someone to explain what Kaz Oshiro's astonishingly precise reproduction of a minifridge has to do with identity or mass media.

The work of Sheree Hovsepian carries the show. We became transfixed on her video piece, *Middle-Eastern Girls*. In it, a stationary camera captures Hovsepian in the process of photographing a girl of Iraqi descent while engaging in candid conversation about people's preconceptions about their "exotic" ethnicities. As her subject discusses the various ways in which she defies stereotype ("first of all, I'm a Republican..."), she simultaneously embraces them ("we're more cultured as individuals; obviously you're educated..."). Apart from trying to politely correct her subject that it wasn't the "Shewni" Muslims that Saddam had been oppressing, Hovsepian gives her enough rope to hang herself, and she does as she relies on an ethnic slur ("some Puerto Rican trashy ass...") as a key descriptor of a person.

In a kinder, gentler turn, Hovsepian teamed up with Heidi Norton for a series of photographs called *Knowing You, Knowing Me*. As the photographers returned images like *The Place Where I Lost My Virginity*, and *Portrait of Someone Who Looks Like Me*, we found ourselves analyzing our own reactions to the work while the artists examined themselves.—*Jason Mojica*

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