

PATRICIA SWEETOW GALLERY

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Book Art

"Banned and Recovered: Artists Respond to Censorship"

By Johnny Ray Huston

PREVIEW San Francisco Center for the Book makes an ideal SF setting for "Banned and Recovered," a group exhibition devoted to censored literature. (The exhibition also has an East Bay installment at Oakland's African American Museum and Library.) Not all the contributors present examples of book art, though. Enrique Chagoya's large painting Double Portrait of William Burroughs turns its subject's face into, among other things, a pizza of disconnected Peter Bagge-like facial features. Appreciative of Burroughs but far from worshipful, Chagoya also taps into 1950s horror film iconography, depicting the author as a little fly excreting waste.

Among those artists who work directly with books as materials or create them, standouts include: Wendy Miller's Joseph Cornell-like sewn-shut Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets; Barbara Kossy's The Origin of Species (which makes use of an old illustrated guide to birds); and Brian Dettmer's Brave New World (which draws upon Aldous Huxley's tome to create a brain facsimile that also looks like an retro-futurist temple).

The exhibition is well arranged — it's a smart move to place Emory Douglas next to Favianna Rodriguez, who continues Douglas' graphic tradition. But the presentation of most works is too heavy on exposition, to a degree that can inhibit one's interpretive, um, readings. Some pieces dodge this restrictive feeling through playful, imaginative approaches. **Jonathan Burstein, who recently had an excellent show at Patricia Sweetow Gallery, dolls up the Marquis de Sade so he becomes a cherry-cheeked Mona Lisa.** Nigel Poor's Washed Books makes good on its title, putting nine prose works about women — including Vladimir Nabokov's 1955 Lolita and Stephen King's 1974 Carrie — through the washer until poetry emerges from the lint.

BANNED AND RECOVERED: ARTISTS RESPOND TO CENSORSHIP Through Nov. 26. Mon.–Fri., 10 a.m.–5 p.m.; Sat., noon–4 p.m. San Francisco Center for the Book, 300 De Haro, SF. (415) 565-0545. www.sfcb.org