

PATRICIA SWEETOW GALLERY

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Conversation 5 at the San Francisco Art Commission Gallery

By Micaela Van Zwoell

Last night, I attended a preview reception for Conversation 5: **Jamie Vasta** and Nicholas Pye & Sheila Pye, at the San Francisco Arts Commission (SFAC) Gallery.

Jamie Vasta, *Sirens #3* Jamie Vasta's presentation, from a recent series entitled, *Sirens*, is a collection of four works ranging in size from a sweetly 16 x 16 inches to an imposing panel 6 x 6 feet square. Renowned for exuberant paintings depicting dark and dramatic narratives, Vasta "paints" with glitter. The resulting surface is beautiful and enticing – drawing the viewer closer. In my case, I was so attracted by her medium, that I didn't perceive her subject matter until later. Often violent and, in this case, replete with active and implied movement, Vasta's subject matter is compelling for its psychological and sexual content. Her works, resident on the floor and on the walls of the SFAC Gallery, are shown in a manner that purposefully directs the viewer to contemplate her work from a perspective of power - reinforcing the artist's theme (based on mythical tales of sirens luring sailors to their death) and intent to push the viewer "to reflect on gender-based power dynamics" (SFAC press release). The dramatic scale, positioning of the viewer in relation to the subject matter, expression of her subjects, and medium was impossible to ignore. (image: Jamie Vasta. *Sirens #3*, 2009. Glitter on panel. 72 x 72 inches. Courtesy of Patricia Sweetow Gallery)

Nicholas Pye & Sheila Pye, *Loudly, Death Unties*, 2007, is a single channel HD video of 11 minutes by Nicholas Pye and Sheila Pye. A young couple from Montréal, Canada, the Pyes have been making films and photographs together, integrating their collective interests in performance, cinema, and large format still photography, in addition to their individual practices since 2001. Their work has been widely exhibited internationally in art galleries, museums, film festivals, and was recently acquired by the Smithsonian Institution's Hirshhorn Museum. The final film of a trilogy of works about relationships, *Loudly, Death Unties* is about the death of a lover. Employing Irish folklore, the piercing wail of a Banshee announces the inevitable death of someone. In *Loudly, Death Unties*, a Banshee, in the form of a little girl, arrives and through a series of uncanny events, forces one lover to say goodbye to the other. This film, making its Bay Area premiere, received rave reviews in *Artforum*, *Art in America* and *Art News*. (image: Nicholas Pye & Sheila Pye, *Loudly, Death Unties*, 2007, single channel HD video, 11 minutes. Courtesy of Nicholas Pye and Sheila Pye)

Conversation 5 is the SFAC's latest production of its ongoing exhibition series, *Conversations*. The San Francisco Art Commission's series, *Conversations*, features local artists vis-à-vis an artist from another point on the globe, and intends to provide a framework for discussion regarding the Bay Area's participation in an international contemporary art dialogue.