

Grouped into separate panels, several artists were asked to critique the work of two artists whose work was on view at SFMOMA in the Fall 2001. Here are sections of the conversational-type review:

Seeing the video work of Nam June Paik and Jose Antonio Hernandez-Diez — both whose work is now on view at SFMOMA — is to be able to see two ends of the video avant-garde. Korea-born Nam (b. 1964) is considered the “grandfather of video art” and was also a founding member of the Fluxists. The Fluxists were a progenitor of change, seeking ways to challenge traditional art forms much like the Dadaists before them. Nam believed that “video was the paintbrush of the future” and worked using multiple-monitors on which played an ebb and flow of non-representational images. What is now seen as marketing eye-candy played in the background on MTV or major rock shows, was ó as envisioned by Nam — a deconstruction of the visual narrative and a nod toward the colors and textures of painting. Later in creating a codified language of discontent, mainstream rock and its promoters looked toward the video language of Nam.

Hernandez-Diez (b. 1964) works in several mediums. The video work on view in Ultra-Baroque, a show of contemporary Latin-American artists, bridges the connection between video work and performance — a trajectory from the groundwork laid by the Fluxists. Argentinean Hernandez-Diez is represented at SFMOMA by his paintings, video work and his most recent pictures. His earliest work shown is the *Vehiclos Perfectos* series, which was done from 1993-1996. On their major form of transportation, the skateboard, Hernandez-Diez painted the portraits of revolutionary street children. SFMOMA mislabeled them as “youth” which I think general connotes an older child. Youth (or teen) revolution is rather cliché. What is striking about these portraits are the youthful faces. These faces have clearly seen more injustice firsthand than most of us ó middle-class viewers of an art exhibit ó will ever see in a lifetime. The anger in their eyes is palatable. The remainder of their faces is hidden behind handkerchiefs. The connection between these Argentinean child rebels and child glue-sniffers in Guatemala was unmistakable. The Acrylic portraits read like a National Geographic photo essay.

During the time of painting *Vehiclos Perfectos*, Hernandez-Diez created INDY (1995). Four televisions — topped by skateboard trucks with wheels — played continuously looped videos of Hernandez-Diez hand propelled across asphalt by the same trucks, which he holds firmly in his fist. The image is like a propelled revolutionary fist continuously moving through the streets. The body hair on the back of the hand pulls us away from the child portraits in *Vehiclos Perfectos* and puts the artist into this narrative. Like much of contemporary performance art, this is about the body and its limitations in movement (to move this quickly the body must become one with the skateboard) and its power (as an arbiter of change). The Fluxists encouraged anti-art production. By re-claiming the skateboard as a medium to receive paint, Hernandez-Diez seeks to elevate the board and board art, and to call into question (and thus degenerate) the power of the museum. In a straightforward presentation of several monitors, Hernandez-Diez is working in the tradition started by Nam.

Hernandez-Diez's most recent work seems disillusioned with skateboarding movement as a movement. Two C-prints of stacked skater shoes, reminding me of the obsessive collections of your average suburban skater, are titled Marx and Kant ó perhaps an ironic statement on the commodification of dissent.

In the Double Feature gallery, SFMOMA's home for art-based film and video work, Nam's piece is quiet and sculptural — a departure from the visual overload of his earliest work. Entitled *Egg Grows* (1984-1989), the piece features six monitors in progressively larger sizes; although, the last three of equal size are stacked. They are

lined up facing the viewer along a white shelf. Each monitor is angled slightly more until the last stack is entirely on its side. Each monitor screen plays an egg. The egg is a live video feed from a security camera pointed at an egg, which sits to the left of the monitors. Because each monitor is slightly larger than the previous, the egg appears to grow and rotate. Moving away from the notion of video as paintbrush, Nam is playing with unique qualities of video to exaggerate form, and thus create its own visual reality. The flicker of the screen adds movement to the static egg as well. The image feed has become more real than the actual, live egg.

By itself, the piece seems a little cold. And as is unfortunately typical of many contemporary museums, the descriptive piece on the wall does not give the viewer enough information to appreciate the piece in terms of Nam's work. Museums covertly dictate taste, why not let the audience know overtly why a particular piece is important? The Hernandez-Diez group of work is packed into a show that could use some serious editing. Ultra-Baroque, while trying to provide a survey, created a mishmash of images that are far too numerous and presented without enough space to really enjoy them as individual work. Instead, the work is presented like another commodified trend. The work overwhelms the viewer like a trip to Home Depot.