

Los Angeles Times

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 11, 1998

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Art Reviews

Examining Consequences of Medical Advances

By Claudine Isé, *Special to the Times*

"Bioethics: Thresholds of Corporeal Completeness," a timely group show curated by artist Deborah Edwards at Side Street Projects, probes such hot-button issues as reproductive rights, human cloning, biological warfare and genetic testing. The artists in this exhibition suggest that, with every biomedical leap forward, the individual's ethical and emotional burdens grow heavier.

Ruth Katz, Aline Mare, Lisa Schoyer and Erika Rotheberg convey a sense of bemusement at the tangled web of choices brought about by advances in reproductive technologies and genetic engineering. Katz takes large-scale color photographs of a woman contemplating a range of contraceptive devices; Mare digitally alters the embryonic photographs used by anti-abortion activists; Schoyer displays medical charts and documentation relating to her son's rare genetic disorder; and Rothenberg's witty text and photo piece relates a cheerfully narcissistic fantasy about raising a cloned daughter.

Joy Garnett's blurry paintings of X-ray images invest a cold and "objective" science with emotional content, while Nora Murphy's soggy birthday cake painting evokes the gravitational pull of decomposing flesh. Philip Riley, Hilary Lorenz and Susan Rankaitis use digital and experimental forms of photography to depict microbes and DNA strands; David Kremers "grows" an abstract painting by placing bacteria that is genetically engineered to produce various colored enzymes onto an acrylic plate; and Martin Betz, Mike McMillan and Endi Poskovic address issues relating to eugenics and ethnic cleansing.

The show's standout works include Dinh Q. Le's heartbreaking—and horrifying—"Damaged Gene," composed of a videotape and several relics from an August public art project in which Le opened a store in Ho Chi Minh City that sold toys and clothing for conjoined twins and children born with Agent Orange-related birth defects; Lisa Stanley's richly detailed Plexiglass dollhouse, each room a different stage of life mediated by medical technology; and Ken Gonzales-Day's ominous, strangely seductive digital photographs of skin lesions and dermatological growths.

* Side Street Projects, 1629 18th St., #2, Santa Monica, (310) 829-0779, through Dec. 19. Closed Sunday-Tuesday.