

Exhibit challenges the eye and the intellect

"Domestics & Exotics," reads the sign over the Budget car rental franchise. The words are reflected in the rear window of a white car in the foreground, its taillight a grinning three-layered jolt of color echoed in the Budget sign on the street behind it.

Standing near the entrance are two figures: a man in a white T-shirt bearing the word "informant," and a woman in a black T-shirt that reads "native."

The figures are the artists Allan deSouza and Yong Soon Min, and the photograph is from their collaborative series "alter idem/performing personae" of 1994, and is on view in an exhibition called "AlterNatives" at the Robert B. Menschel Photography Gallery at Syracuse University's Schine Student Center through June 15.



This installation by Allan deSouza and Yong Soon Min hangs across the middle of the gallery. It's a series of black-and-white prints on floating panels.

Light Work



SHERRY CHAYAT

"Domestics & Exotics" is indeed an appropriate text for these artists who appropriate images from the cultural landscape, in this case, Los Angeles. This series is

based on a critique of the relationships between "real Americans" (of domestic production) and immigrants (from exotic cultures).

DeSouza and Min probe the relationship between photography and anthropology, and as "performing personae," between the artist as informant (cultural interpreter) and native (the object of study).

A RELATED installation that hangs across the middle of the gallery, also titled "alter idem/performing personae," is a series of black-and-white prints on floating panels that can be read at a distance as one cohesive image from either side.

Here, dressed in their "native" and "informant" T-shirts, the artists represent themselves at close range, their arms outstretched. The posture's open-armed welcome is undetermined by the text on the shirts. At the same time, its reference to crucifixion implies the self-inflicted, shamanistic martyrdom of performance art.

The artists' examination of cultural identity, race and the politics of representation is a sophisticated one, born of their own personal experience. DeSouza, who was born in Kenya, emigrated to England, where he was active in the Black Arts Movement during the 1980s; he now lives in Los Angeles. His photography has been shown in major galleries and museums in London and the United States, and his writ-

ing has been published in journals and anthologies here and abroad; he is also the author of a book, "The Sikhs in Britain."

MIN. BORN in Korea, emigrated to the United States, where she has exhibited at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art in New York City and the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, Minn. She is assistant professor in the School of the Arts of the University of California at Irvine. A solo touring show of her recent work is being organized by the Tyler Gallery at Temple University's Tyler School of Art in Philadelphia, Pa., and the Krannert Art Museum at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Ill.

In addition to their collaborative work, Min and deSouza, who are married, work individually in very different ways. Particularly impressive among their individual series of photographs on view at the Menschel Gallery are Min's "Defining Moments" and "Belly Talk," and deSouza's "Dick" and "Jane."

"DEFINING MOMENTS," created in 1992, is a series of self-portraits in which the artist's face bears the letters "DMZ" (referring to the demilitarized zone of the Korean partition) and her chest, the word "HEARTLAND," a poignant reference to the reunification movement.

In one of these silver gel prints,

other words appear: "occupied" runs down one arm, "territory" down the other, and in a concentric movement outward from the artist's navel are significant dates, beginning with 1953, the year of her birth and the end of the Korean War. Additional text, etched in glass that covers the photograph, uses an old Scottish folk song, "My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean," to make its heartfelt political point:

"My body lies over the ocean/ My body lies over the sea/ My body lies over the DMZ/ Oh bring back my body to me..."

IN SEVERAL of the prints in this series, superimposed across the artist's face like disturbing memories and nightmares are appropriated news photographs: soldiers running through fields, student uprisings, the Los Angeles riots of 1992, in which many Korean-American shop owners were assaulted.

Min's "Belly Talk" occupies nearly the entire length of the Menschel Gallery, and is composed of large color panels of naked midriffs with various degrees of flab and hairiness, with superimposed texts that spiral outward from the subjects' navels.

In one, instead of a concentric pattern, the text darts in a constellation of angles; in another, it forms a helix; and in still another, a rectangular maze. Each represents a nar-

native written by the subject upon whose belly the text is printed, and the story lines range from an explanation of a substantial vertical scar on a pockmarked, elderly paunch to musings about the past (" '60s idealism and cynicism, experimentation, introspection, Existentialism") and the present ("move to suburbs and buy a mini-van... welcome to the middle of life").

To read these, one has to go through some difficult contortions, and the day I was looking at the show, trying to get a clear upside-down view was made even more interesting by the presence of a body lying along the wall — not a homeless person, as far as I could tell, but an SU student taking a nap.

DESOUZA, IN his interrelated "Dick" and "Jane" series, gives the innocent primers a sexual undertow and conflation of genders.

"Dick" is a grouping of narrow computer-assisted chromogenic prints using an image that at first appears to be a vulva, but which we then recognize as the sideways view of a man's mustache-surrounded, slightly open mouth. Lips glisten; teeth are just visible in these amusing yet disturbing pictures with their suggestions of male fear of female potency/castration.

"Jane" uses lines of text in a vessel format against a skin-tone or terracotta background. The vessel shape, traditionally symbolic of the

The details

What: "AlterNatives" exhibition featuring artists Allan deSouza and Yong Soon Min.
When: Through June 15.
Where: Robert B. Menschel Photography Gallery at Syracuse University's Schine Student Center, 303 University Place. The gallery is open daily 10 a.m. to 10 p.m.
Information: 443-1985.



Light Work

From the series "alter idem/performing personae" by Allan deSouza and Yong Soon Min.

female, is countered by the text's point of view: a male/transvestite's fictional autobiography.

DeSouza is also represented by several computer-assisted collage prints, some weaving together critiques of cultural-imperialist views of "exotic" India, others examining stereotypical representations of Native Americans through appropriated images in the manner of late 19th-century trompe l'oeil (eye-fooling) realist painters like John Peto and John Haberle.

This exhibition provides much to ponder. For the most part, its conceptual basis is embodied in an enjoyable visual experience. ★

Sherry Chayat of Syracuse has been writing free-lance articles about art for Stars since 1985.