

Only human

"Standing on One Foot" and "Steve Locke" at the Mills Gallery; "Quantum Grids" at the Sert Gallery

BY RANDI HOPKINS

Positioned on a low bench, a white ceramic mask cast from artist Heejung Kim's face serves as a two-sided, blank screen for projected videos of her face. The disembodied faces are each speaking, one in English, and one in Kim's native Korean. The two sides seem to struggle to connect, but remain at odds, two halves of an uneasy whole. It is the barely audible, unmistakably human tones and flickery movement of this sculpture that greet visitors to "**Standing on One Foot**," currently on view at the Boston Center for the Arts' Mills Gallery. Curated by Barbara O'Brien, the show features work by four artists who use the human figure as a jumping off point to explore issues of memory, communication, transformation, and beauty. In addition to Kim's video and sculpture, Lauren O'Neal contributes a dynamic sculpture and poetic series of drawings investigating the emotional life of our clothing (among other things), Jedediah Morfit makes sculpture that presents direct, physical challenges to human scale, materiality, and inter-relationships, and Barbara Grad creates allegorical drawings and etchings that play off the gallery walls through cast shadows. On October 15, at 3 pm, O'Brien leads a gallery tour with the artists.

Getting down to a grittier aspect of the human figure, behind the discreet wall of the relatively new Mills Project Space at the Mills Gallery, **Steve Locke** presents a lovely wall of tiny self-portraits, each contained in a little circle that evokes the Victorian portrait-in-a-locket. But forget Victorian repression — Locke's circle is based on the interior circumference of a cock ring, a device, according to the BCA's press release, "meant to enhance and hold the sexualized body, a sort of container for desire." Locke, an African-American artist whose work generally addresses maleness and sexuality, reveals an astounding array of personalities in these self-portraits — in fact, in over 50 images, only the facial hair remains relatively consistent.

Early conceptual artists used the structural device of the grid to impose a rigorous, external order on their art, studiously distancing themselves from the messy, organic form taken by expressionistic work. As it turns out, the most interesting thing about the grid may well be the tension, subtle or not so subtle, that it creates with the inescapable messiness of the creative process. "**Quantum Grids: Sol LeWitt, Yayoi Kusama, and Cai Guo-Qiang**," opening at Harvard's Sert Gallery on October 15, features just three artworks, each using the grid as its organizing principle. A geometric LeWitt sculpture from 1978, a three-part oil painting by Kusama from 1967, and Cai Guo-Qiang's 1986 gunpowder-on-Japanese paper meditation on the mushroom cloud pack a lot of punch in a small but inspired grouping.