

The Sound and the Purity

Emanations

at Nonsequitur Gallery

Imagine walking into a street-level lounge on Central Avenue and suddenly feeling like you've died. The ash-can reality of city life is left behind, and everything around you is placid, canny, even a little eerie. No wings, halos or harps—just a sense of pristine purity. That's the feeling you can expect when you step into Nonsequitur Gallery during its exhibition of *Emanations*.

Inside the humble storefront on 5th Street, all is light, clean and a little comical—like Limbo's waiting room. Not antiseptic, not empty. The three-dimensional pieces of Claire Giovanello and the "sound installation" of gallery-owner Steve Peters are more full, more pregnant than that.

Giovanello's work is certainly stark, but there's nothing stingy about it. Instead, her pieces boldly combine lines, light and texture, making them look as if they somehow emerge from the wall itself.

In one series of pieces, she has built wooden frames of different depths, swaddled them in white canvas and wrapped them fast in cheesecloth. The result is an odd visual trick—objects which look sharp and edgy and, at the same time, gauzy and soft. Mounted on the white wall, they are both obvious and yet nearly invisible.

In the two more recent sets by Giovanello, there are no canvasses or frames. Instead, the artwork is literally part of the wall. In one piece, Giovanello has hammered 21 rows of roofing nails into the wall, forming three perfect squares. It may not be very inspiring, but like in her other work, it's never clear where the wall ends and the art begins, which is part of its deceitful seamlessness.

Next to that, finally, is a series of vertical lines—foot-long aluminum brackets pushed into the plaster. At the middle of this litany of metal pieces, there are maybe a half-dozen struts clustered together. Then on each side, empty space makes a gap. After that, the brackets begin again, getting farther and farther apart. It seems to represent something specific and tense—like the release of pressure, or some impossible economy of

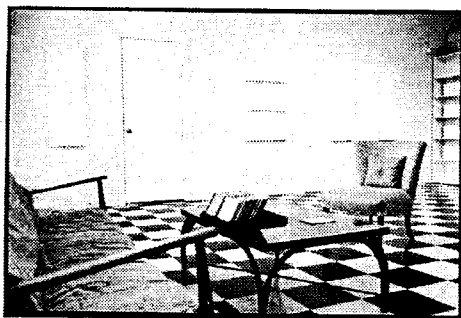
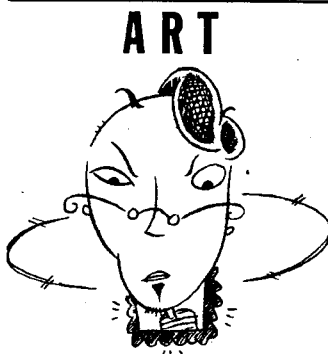
numbers, or just the motion made by sound waves.

That's where Steve Peters comes in. After seeing Giovanello's work, he created a "sound installation," which is as creepy, yet calming, as the work on the walls. Basically, Peters has made a recording of simple stereo feedback—the freakish squeaks you hear when a microphone gets too close to a speaker. Each room has its own sound signature, and Peters has used feedback to find the aural fingerprint of the gallery space. By testing each frequency, he found the gallery's "sweet

spots"—levels where the speaker gave a little squeal—and recorded them on CD. The result is not the harsh scream you hear when a bar-room band is setting up its gear. Instead, it's long, low and only slightly dissonant, like a moistened fingertip running on the rim of a wine glass. Like Giovanello's work, the

mellow tones seem to seep out of the walls. And between the sounds, the silence is deafening.

In all, the experience of *Emanations* is unreal in its simplicity. There's a lot to see, but nothing to look at—a lot to listen to, but you can hardly hear it. More than a visual image or a certain



Lesley Crane

sound, these artists have managed to create a sense of space—an atmosphere that is both lush and quieting. Next time you're on a lunch break or a shopping jaunt downtown, stop in and see for yourself. If not quite heavenly, the show will still remind you why—in our everyday life outside of art—we prize such purity.

—Blake de Pastino

Emanations runs at the Nonsequitur Music Gallery (317 5th Street SW) through April 12. Call 224-9483 for more information.