

# Art in America

Guide to Museums, Galleries, and Artists

## Melissa McGill at CRG — By Eleanor Heartney

There were only three works in Melissa McGill's engagingly understated show. Boomerang consisted of a few small droplets of reflective blown glass clinging unobtrusively, here and there, to the walls and ceiling of the gallery. Easy to miss altogether, they had a disconcerting aspect when perceived—resembling bits of oozing mercury that seemed at times to defy the pull of gravity.

Portrait X (1-9) also had a vaguely sci-fi quality. This work consisted of a set of fuzzy gray blobs with noselike protrusions and thumbhole eyes and mouths. Arranged neatly on a narrow wall shelf, they were revealed in the press release to be composed of lint. That piece of information only added to the humorous absurdity of these amorphous personages.

The final piece, an untitled audio work, consisted of a pair of conch shells on pedestals, facing each other opening to opening. Through them were projected the sounds of a woman's voice murmuring in unintelligible gasps. Again the press release offered vital information, revealing that the audio was a recording of dialogue spoken by actress Anna Magnani in Rossellini's *Amore*. However, McGill altered the recording by removing the middle of each sentence. This gives the sounds that remain an odd, and definitely sexual, rhythm interspersed with what sounds like heavy breathing.

In each of these works, absence—the space around the glass blobs, the status of lint as discardable residue, the intervals of silence between sounds—is as important as presence. In earlier works, McGill has pursued this idea in other ways; she has created blown-glass forms from the shapes around figures in classic paintings, for instance, or made rubber casts from the insides of pockets. She has been compared to Rachel Whiteread, another materializer of negative space. But while Whiteread's sculptures have a mournful monumentality, McGill's work is quirky and playful. Her forms are also organic rather than architectural, suggesting a world in which new life forms are gestating in the unnoticed cracks and crevices.

McGill's delicate poetry transfigures the mundane in ways that bring to mind the metamorphic works of Tom Friedman and Tim Hawkinson. Like them, she reinvents the ordinary world, investing it with a quiet magic which is undiminished when the trick is revealed.