

TIF SIGFRIDS

LAWEEKLY

Gallerist Displays Paintings Inside Her Own Ear

By Carol Cheh Fri., Oct. 11 2013 at 12:01 PM

L.A.'s hippest new art gallery launches this week, and with a flourish. Tif Sigfrids, formerly director of the prestigious Thomas Solomon Gallery in Chinatown, is opening her own space in the burgeoning Hollywood arts district with a solo show by provocative L.A.-based artist Joe Sola. Known primarily for his edgy performance work, Sola chose to christen Sigfrids' new venture with a suite of six portrait paintings. Sounds pretty traditional, except for one fact: the portraits are done in micro-miniature, and they will be exhibited in the dealer's ear. Yes, her ear.



Photo: Carol Cheh

Sola has crafted a custom white-box gallery space that fits perfectly inside Sigfrids' right ear. The six tiny paintings are mounted inside this space, resembling a typical gallery show. It wasn't easy -- the paintings are done on bits of styrene the size of dots, and even a human hair was too big to work on them. Sola had to get the tiniest acupuncture needle in existence and then whittle that down to a size that he could use. He used a microscope to meticulously maneuver little blobs of paint into the form of portraits, and he had to hold his breath the whole time lest the entire enterprise blow away.

The result is the most strikingly minimal show you will see this season, not to mention a very rare instance of art being installed on the body of its keeper. Sigfrids' new gallery, located on a busy corner in Hollywood, is a fairly typical art space with white walls, a reception desk, a few shelves with books, etc. For the next month, it will be almost empty except for Sigfrids herself, who will sit in the gallery with Sola's work in her ear. The work is for sale, although it can't be worn by anyone else, since it was custom-made for Sigfrids. (The artist and the dealer hope to place the piece in a museum someday.)

This unusual exhibition is actually a logical move for Sigfrids, and a very apt opening show for her gallery. The impresario built a name for herself in the local scene by organizing offbeat performance events at the legendary Hop Louie bar

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in Chinatown. Shortly after signing on as Tom Solomon's director, she began holding art exhibitions in her desk, which was fashioned out of a vitrine that had been built for a Pacific Standard Time-related exhibition. These whimsical shows featured sculptures that bulged on top of and around her workspace, videos that were shown on her monitor, prints and smaller objects that were laid inside the vitrine, and so on. Sigfrids promoted them like any other show, writing press releases for them and holding opening receptions.



Photo: Carol Cheh

Tif Sigfrids mingles with guests at a private preview of her new gallery.

Sola, who may have been partially motivated by a desire to one-up the quirkiness of the desk shows, proposed the ear show idea to Sigfrids during a casual conversation. Sigfrids' response was enthusiastic. "I don't think I could have done this with anyone else," the artist said. "Tif is open to anything, and I really love that about her."

The beauty of this exhibition is that it can be read as a satire of the preciousness and insularity that often plague the art world, at the same time that it offers a legitimate spectacle with ingeniously crafted art. At a private preview on Thursday night, friends and supporters took turns peering into Sigfrids' ear to see the exquisite miniature gallery that was perched there. The piece is beautifully mounted, and really does look like a Lilliputian art exhibit. Beginning this Saturday, you'll have a chance to see the show for yourself.