

EXHIBITS

Immaterial Imprisonment

Peter Sarkisian opens up a new view of the world by trapping it inside video walls.

RARE DROP

BY PETER SARKISIAN
WOOD STREET GALLERIES, DOWNTOWN
THROUGH MARCH 6
471-5605

When you walk into the first level of Rare Drop, the current installation by Peter Sarkisian, it may take you a minute to realize what you're seeing. Viewed from across the room, it appears to be a small, clear box enclosing the nude bodies of a man and woman, who twist, turn and writhe inside the square, climbing over and crawling underneath each other in search of rest. As you circle the structure, you watch their slithering from all sides; peer at the top of the case and intermittently a hand will creep out through a round hole, grasping at the lid and leaving smudgy fingerprints behind.

Get a little closer and it's clear this is not a performance piece. Sarkisian has not done Damian Hurst one better and upped the ante to humans; what you're seeing in "Dusted" is video. Sarkisian is meticulously projecting images upon five flat surfaces to create depth within them, and the effect is flawless. As the figures wriggle within their prison and a voice intones a litany of names, you're as ensnared as they are.

The other works in this collection are equally compelling. In "Roadside Series No. 1," two rooms in a roadside motel are evoked by two suitcases and pairs of shoes separated by a wall. The video and audio mimic the light and sound of cars passing outside to elicit feelings of isolation (in some viewers) and possibility (in others).

The title piece conjures sleep and dreaming as pillowcases seem to move beneath restless heads and water drips into bowls. A shadow streaks across an empty bowl to generate a non-existent presence that may have you sneaking nervous glances back over your shoulder.

What makes these works so mesmerizing is Sarkisian's restraint in allowing his video to speak for itself. In trapping his subjects within the frames of his lens, he sets his viewers' imaginations free.

—LISSA BRENNAN



"Dusted," at the Wood Street Galleries.

THE 1999 ORCHID EXHIBIT: ORCHIDS THROUGH THE AGES

PHIPPS CONSERVATORY, OAKLAND
THROUGH MARCH 7
622-6914

For many, the only real pleasure to be found in winter is in discovering a way to escape it. If you're stuck living in Pittsburgh, this can only mean taking off work, packing your bags and shelling out hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars to board a plane and travel to somewhere less frigid for relief.

Or you could just hand over a five-spot and spend an afternoon at Phipps Conservatory, journeying through the exhibition of orchids that currently fills one wing of the huge greenhouse. Along with a staggering array of the beautifully bizarre plants displaying every color of the rainbow, there are lots of informational plaques detailing the history of the blooms and the frenzy they've inspired. In England in 1833, the nation was swept up in "orchidelirium," defined as a "British

national mental illness" of passion for the flowers. Not only was there the risk of psychological addiction to the exotic posies, there were physical hazards as well: Early orchid hunters often met untimely ends due to drowning, tumbling off cliffs and violent rivalries for the treasured blossoms that, not infrequently, led to murder.

Phipps is not quite so dangerous, though you might want to watch your step in the desert room among the enormous cacti. Close your eyes and take a deep breath of the tropically-scented, balmy air and you'll joyfully swear you're not in Pittsburgh anymore—unless you open up and peek through the glass to see the snow piled up outside.

—L.B.

From a distance, it appears to be a small, clear box enclosing the nude bodies of a man and woman who twist, turn and writhe. But get a little closer and you'll find this is not a performance piece.