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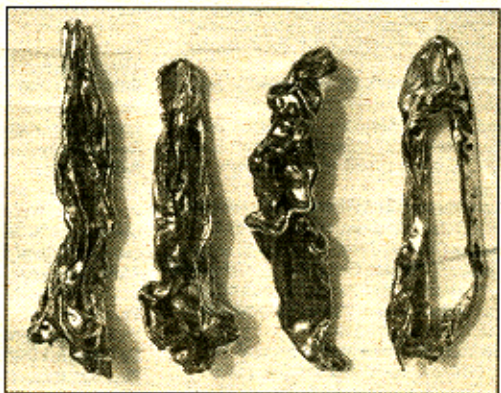
stage listings

Critic's choice: art

'I Do'

Through Fri/28, *Femina Potens Gallery*

While the country continues to argue over same-sex marriage as a legal right, Elizabeth Stephens and Annie Sprinkle have firmly situated their love affair in the realm of culture by staging their commitment to each another as performance art. Last December the couple began the piece *Seven Years of Love as Art* with the first of seven annual marriages based on the chakras' themes and colors. "I Do" presents documentation of the event, including a video projection, and the ruby-red outfits worn by the couple. In the center of the gallery Stephens and Sprinkle have placed a bed covered with a red "security" blanket — the theme of their first year of marriage — where they invite the audience to cuddle with them at weekly scheduled times. The piece is something like an updated version of John Lennon and Yoko Ono's late-'60s "bed-in," as the artists make their personal lives public and, in so doing, challenge the policies of the state. Stephens and Sprinkle refuse to be denied their right to marry and lay claim to it on grounds that exceed the authority of the government. They present marriage as a cultural institution shaped by interpersonal dynamics and demonstrate the power of groups to construct communal bonds and systems of meaning on their own terms. In the process, they thematize the art already at work in social institutions — and in marriage and gender roles in particular. The show includes documentation of other performance pieces by Stephens, including *Maybe Baby*, a ritual designed to help her determine which of 10 sperm donations to choose, and *Wish You Were Here*, a four-month-long road trip during which she took directions from her friends to photograph roadside altars, talk to locals about military monuments, and document "tokens of butchdom," among other assignments. Stephens's *The Panty Project* is a collection of bronzed underwear worn by porn stars and academics. Accompanying text overexaggerates the association between the two as classes, but the piece documents the remarkable intersection between the divergent groups in such figures as Sprinkle and Sharon Mitchell, who hold Ph.D.s and participate in porn films. Perhaps this is the ideal that Stephens and Sprinkle seek to embody in their marriage — to think with the sex appeal of porn stars and to make love with the intellectual rigor of academics. *Mon.–Wed., Fri., 1–5 p.m., 465 South Van Ness, S.F. (415) 217-9340. (Clark Buckner)*



THE PANTY PROJECT (2004), BY ELIZABETH STEPHENS