

Marcel Odenbach and Henrik Olesen

*Anton Kern Gallery
558 Broadway, near Prince Street,
SoHo*

Today, tomorrow and Jan. 2-13

Marcel Odenbach's video installation "Herd Instinct" is pretty much about what its title says. The main image is footage of an annual folk festival in Lichtenstein where flower-bedecked cows are brought from pastures through the town streets in a celebration of seasonal change. Overlapping images run behind them: crowds cheering at sports events and rock concerts, or charging, aggressively or in panic, through streets during political disturbances.

Some people find the sociological content of Mr. Odenbach's work heavy-handed. But his videos usually have so much going on that they end up being about much more than the this-equals-that concepts they are based on. "Herd Instinct" implies all kinds of things about innocence and guilt, sweetness and danger, mysticism, humor and real-politik. With its soundtrack of bells and shrieks and its way of making the ordinary look exotic, it is as enthrallingly manipulative as a Baroque painting.

The work of the young Danish artist Henrik Olesen, in his first United States solo, is just the opposite, visually speaking. His installation is hidden behind a flimsy partition built for the occasion. Over a narrow doorway is stenciled the phrase "laws are straight." The gallery seems to be nearly empty. A pair of huge black leather shoes sits on the floor; inside one the word "authority" has been handwritten. Two tree branches lie together, bent as if in a loose embrace. "Biology is straight" is painted in white on one.

A wall is plastered with printed information about the legal status of homosexuality internationally, including a list of countries where it is a capital crime (Saudi Arabia, Iran, Sudan, etc.). On the side of a waxed cardboard milk carton, where nutritional information or public service announcements often appear, is a report on the frequency of same-sex pairings among male giraffes.

The installation and ideas alike have an adamant, gawky candor. They are like a teenage version of political art. That seems to be the point. *HOLLAND COTTER*