



FOTOFEST2006

ERIKA HARRSCH / EROS-THANATOS

ARTISTS: INSTALLATION BY ERIKA HARRSCH WITH
SOUND COLLABORATION BY EDMUND MOONEY

Eros-Thanatos, Erika Harrsch's latest project, takes the form of a multilevel installation and sound environment representing the cycle of life on earth. Posing women as objects of desire, and hence engaging with representations of the body, affection, emotion, psychic and social experiences, and the narcissistic pleasure of being possessed as a loved object, Harrsch suggests that the construction of identity and the development of personality is a condensation of sex and psyche. This installation focuses on

the butterfly as a visual icon and metaphor for women. In this case, the femme fatale is caught in a constant struggle between subordination and liberation, sublimation and humiliation, life and death.

Using film and sound recordings made on visits to the monarch butterfly sanctuary in Michoacan, Mexico, Harrsch has recreated the experience of witnessing this amazing natural phenomenon firsthand. By juxtaposing a large-scale projection of butterflies in flight against the backdrop of the gallery space with a floor both littered with synthetic replicas of thousands of dead butterflies and superimposed with images suggestive of the female anatomy, Harrsch exposes

both the grace and the violence of the natural realm. Such violence is a part of nature, shown here through the forces of destruction and chaos. Although we may build a world where work and reason prevail, there remains an undercurrent of violence at the root of our being. Despite this, the radiance of life seems to appear in the realm where death and eroticism merge. At brief moments in human experience—most notably involving intimacy, birth, and death—we experience the continuity of life. The passage of the monarch becomes the emblem of that understanding.

Diane Barber



ERIKA HARRSCH • UNTITLED, FROM *EROS-THANATOS*, 2006 • VIDEO STILL