

ART

By Kay Larson

Downtown

The FBI's depraved destruction of actress Jean Seberg is the source of **MARGIA KRAMER's** bitter and vertiginous installation in the seven-person show at Artists Space. Seberg, who had given money to the Black Panther Party, was victimized by faked letters claiming that her unborn baby was half black (the baby died at birth). When Seberg committed suicide this fall, Kramer petitioned the FBI under the Freedom of Information Act, received the file (in which Seberg is referred to as an "alleged promiscuous and sex-perverted white actress"), and is displaying copies at the door of *Essential Documents . . . Part I: Secret*.

Kramer's installation in the small back room forces you to get involved—in order to see the piece you must mount a tall ladder placed directly in the doorway. From a scary height near the ceiling you look down on a carpet of black sand. On it is a quotation from a phone conversation of Seberg's—a pathetically lonely lament: "I began cracking up . . . without knowing it . . . we opened the coffin and took 180 photographs and everybody got a chance to check it out." The words, formed with red and yellow sand, recall the medicinal power of Navajo sand paintings, but the visual and physical contortions necessary

to lean over and read the inscription obliterate any sense of well-being and force you to stare uncomfortably into this black morass of nausea and self-disgust. You feel that you, too, could easily topple over the edge and fall into the nightmare.

Nothing else at Artists Space quite carries the wallop of Kramer's confessional, though **PATRICIA CAIRE** has produced a graceful piece mythologizing violence. Sheets of translucent white acetate fall from the ceiling like curtains; on them, in opaque black, are crooked windows or half-figures carrying tommy guns. When you walk through, you catch threatening images out of the corner of an eye. Flickering repetition and the feeling of being surrounded contribute to a cinematic freeze-frame effect that made me wonder whether Caire (who is French) had been watching old Eliot Ness/ *Untouchables* episodes. The violence, however, is as fictional as a Raymond Chandler story.

The three others were generally less effective, though I liked **SETH LADERMAN's** self-referential photographs in which real anatomical parts are submerged in soft-focus backgrounds, as though the artist had been caught peering into each moment of creation. But **KEN**

GOODMAN who makes monochromatic paintings from photographs, kept far too much distance on his subject matter, even though (or perhaps because) the method requires it. **FREYA HANSEL's** room, full of wooden slats hung from ceiling and walls, was apparently an attempt to suggest levitation. Unfortunately everything stayed put.

Laderman, Goodman, and Caire are up through February 9th. Kramer and Hansel will be replaced after January 19th by **EARL RIPLING** and **ANN WILSON**, who will be recreating early Constructivist sets for her new theatre piece, *Gymnast*. (Artists Space, 105 Hudson Street.) **K.L.**