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**ART PRACTICAL**

**Makeover**

By Mary Anne Kluth  
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*Makeover* at Southern Exposure, curated by Jennie Ottinger, abounds with playful invitations. Audience members at the opening reception on September 11 were encouraged to hang out underneath giant furniture, allowed to fish around in a tank filled with a mysterious transparent substance, and treated to optional haircuts and manicures.

Mutant Salon's installation and performance, much more than just an operational feminine beauty salon, contributed a lot to the event's overall sense of hospitality and acceptance. Beauticians representing an array of gender expressions, dressed like Jem and the Holograms, not only offered their services, but also encouraged the few children in attendance to participate by applying makeup to the salon's sculptural furniture. While the chaotic surfaces of its melted mannequin head and bulbous nail-polish station veered straight into grotesque excess, multiple audience members who received haircuts at the opening reported being pleased with the results. In action, Mutant Salon parodied, subverted, and gloried in common gender-based beautification practices.

Adjacent to Mutant Salon, paintings by Michael Arcega, Jonn Herschend, Jason Jägel, Alicia McCarthy, and Catherine Wagner awaited future collaborative "improvement" by children, at the curator's invitation. Having just watched a small boy apply turquoise eyeshadow in a precise ring around a blob of silvery expanding foam nearby, the possibilities for this exercise seemed impossible, but tantalizing, to predict. This spirit of play is echoed in Double Zero's two videos, which feature two subjects taking turns taping various household objects to each other's faces and heads. These actions recall Bruce Nauman's video works (or, when one fellow has a plastic dinosaur attached to his head, they seem to ask: what if Marina and Ulay made a guest appearance on *Pee-wee's Playhouse?*). The transformations caught on video are at once confrontational, tender, and absurd. The Feminist Economics Department's local credit-reporting bureau *Give Me Cred!* is a similarly multifaceted project. With a love of puns recalling the Merry Pranksters of counterculture past, the FED's installation allows its consultant performers and audience volunteers to meet "under the table" to develop alternative credit-report documents based on a more "complex sense of trustworthiness and integrity" than a FICO score to aid in seeking real loans or rental approvals. While the tone of Elizabeth Beier's illustrations of completed credit reports are whimsical, the FED's attempt to remedy real shortcomings of the current capitalist system is earnest, and the potential to



Members of Mutant Salon, 2015. Courtesy of the Artists.

reframe the way volunteer “consumers” view themselves and others could be profound.

And, finally, the tank with the mystery substance: the Institute for New Feeling’s prototype for contact lenses that alter the wearer’s perception is presented with a video simulation near the tank of transparent gel balls, with instructions that the audience should submerge their hands in them. The video, a mix of urban street footage and minimal graphic animations, suggests that somehow these hypothetical contact lenses might make good vibes more apparent, but mainly I tried to wrap my brain around what they would physically feel like on my eyeballs. It was a fun, if slimy, thought experiment.

At a time of massive change in the demographics and urban shape of the Mission District, and a time of transition at Southern Exposure, the works in *Makeover* collectively acknowledge that life can be messy, but encourage or demonstrate ideals of exchange and openness, and emphasize approaching problems with a sense of humor.

*Makeover* also includes performances by Scott Vermeire and Michael Friedman, and paintings by Eli Thorne.