

EAST BAY **express**

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TRAVELED BAG

Artist records his journey from a duffel's perspective.

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Archives and Audiotapes

Those thumping, rumbling sounds in the gallery are coming from Joshua G. Churchill's duffel bag. He checked the duffel on a trip to Portugal last year and packed it with a recorder that would pick up all the sounds it encountered along the way, like conveyor-belt bumps and airplane-engine roars. Now it's plugged into the wall and playing a mixed-down version of the trip in a continuous loop. He calls the piece "En Route."

Churchill is one of thirteen artists selected from a pool of 225 applicants for the second annual Bay Area Currents exhibition. Although the juried competition was open to all nine Bay Area counties, ten of the thirteen ended up being from Oakland, Berkeley, and Emeryville. Most of them are relatively young, and the overwhelming majority work in nontraditional media, ranging from bamboo to inner tubes, and demonstrate in no uncertain terms what an innovative and vibrant artistic community calls the East Bay home.

In a gallery setting, "En Route" opens itself up to a wide variety of interpretations. If you didn't know its story, you might be tempted to panic and call the bomb squad — a totally reasonable reaction to an unclaimed piece of luggage that's sitting in a public place and making strange noises.

Once you do know what the piece is about, the sounds have exactly the opposite effect. Just because they're mechanical doesn't mean they're harsh or repetitive (they're pretty relaxing, in fact) and hearing them in the background as you wander around the gallery has a lulling effect like the rumble and rhythmic motion of a train, or maybe even like being in the womb and listening to the muffled sounds of mom's daily routine.

It's also worth noting that Churchill has made "En Route" unavailable for purchase, which raises interesting questions about its significance to the artist and its status as an art object. It is partly an installation, partly a Duchampian ready-made, and partly something else that's more intangible and harder to categorize. All of its physical components, like the bag and the audio CD, would be easy enough to replicate. But unlike a traditional ready-made, there is also an experiential component involved. This particular duffel is the actual, original object that the artist took to Portugal and made the vehicle for this project. In that sense it is the only bag of its kind in existence, and now, sitting in the gallery, that uniqueness is essential to its reenactment of the voyage.

BY
**LINDSEY
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**"Bay Area Currents
2003"**
Curated by James Elaine
At the Oakland Art Gallery
199 Kahn's Alley, Oakland,
510-637-0395
Tue.-Fri., 11 a.m.-6 p.m.,
Sat. 11 a.m.-5 p.m.
Through July 4
Curator/artists' talk:
June 19, 6:30-8 p.m.
www.oaklandartgallery.org