

Jeff Greenwald
<http://www.jeffgreenwald.com>

Pleasure & Other Pleasures

Honestly, cyberpals, I don't know what kind of weird-ass art you're into, but I saw a show today that amazed me – as I knew it would, after seeing the invitation. The work is by East Bay artist Susan Danis, and the show is called **PLEASURE**. There are 33 sculptures in the show (at the [Berkeley Art Center](#)), all assemblages. Danis' materials include everything and anything she can find, wherever she can find it, from the floor of SuperCuts to the oral surgeon's trash bin: human hair, socks, rubber snakes, locks, teeth, nets and chains, bull testicles, tails and manes, freeze-dried moles and anal plugs, cigar tips and natural pearls, giant gems and glass eyes.

Photography can't do her work justice, but I'm sticking a couple in anyway to provide the vaguest perimeter of Danis' often disturbing, sometimes hilarious, always astonishing vision. The show is only up until 15 October – but you can also see her terrifying Knife Sphere on permanent display at Studio 333, in Sausalito. (It's not there permanently, but it will be there awhile.) It's like a giant, lethal snowflake made of hundreds of knives, bayonets, machetes, etc.. Very sharp.

On the other side of the spectrum, less threatening but equally entrancing, is travel writer Tanya Shaffer's *Baby Taj*, at [TheatreWorks](#) through October. I first saw *Baby Taj* "performed" at a staged reading in Oakland, and it was as moving and provocative as anything I've seen by Terrence McNally. The story revolves around a 30-something American writer and traveler named Rachel who, desperate to have a child, has made a pact with her best friend: they'll be artificially inseminated, and have their children together.

Rachel is straight; her friend is a lesbian, of Indian descent. When a writing assignment takes Rachel to India, she ends up staying with her friend's extended family in Agra. The polarity between Eastern and Western expectations for women, and the role of family, are explored in a way that is completely engaging and hugely refreshing.

It's hard for Westerners to write about India (and especially Indian families) with language and situations that ring true – but I was 100% convinced by the honesty and insight of Shaffer's play (as I was by her book, *Somebody's Heart is Burning*, which recounts her travels through Africa). Shaffer is a gifted playwright, and the production is beautiful. In this age of institutionalized xenophobia and creeping isolation, this brand of