

Nina Katchadourian, "Talking Popcorn, Paranormal Postcards and Indecision on the Moon"

Debs & Co. through Feb 24 (see Chelsea).

Strait from the "What Drug Was She on When She Thought This Up" file comes Nina Katchadourian's latest show. The exhibition's centerpiece is a popcorn machine with a microphone that feeds the popping sounds into a laptop computer—which first interprets the pops as Morse code, and then translates them into English. Voice software allows the computer to say the words aloud (mostly monosyllabic ones like *me*, *lob* and *ma*). Each night, Katchadourian analyzes the information; on a wall beside the machine, she places vacuum-sealed bags of popcorn with labels featuring the words "spoken" by the exploded kernels.

Playing in a pitch-black front gallery is a recording of astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin as they commu-



Nina Katchadourian, Talking Popcorn, 2000.

nicate with mission control in Houston. Katchadourian has edited the tape to highlight the hesitation of the participants as they discuss where to place a camera. And in the rear gallery is her *Paranormal Postcards*, which presents

images of cities, royal guards, world leaders and animals; Katchadourian has sewn red thread into each postcard to suggest the hidden connections that exist between them.

This is a fun show to visit. Not only do you get to start the popcorn machine and listen to the computer, you can eat popcorn as well (salt and brown bags stamped with a Morse-code key are provided). Katchadourian also makes you pay attention to language—to the intersection between spoken and written words; to language's rhythm and pacing, from the short and long sounds of Morse code to the blips and silences of radio communication; and to the silent but highly communicative vocabulary of visual images.

Katchadourian, of course, isn't a linguist, a theorist or a research scientist—she's an artist. And for someone who goes by that title, popcorn, NASA recordings and postcards of the Lincoln Memorial are all in a day's work. —*Martha Schwendener*