

March 26, 1996 ♦ Vol. XLI No.13 ♦

# It Takes a Village

Janet Biggs  
Chassie Post Gallery  
453 Broome Street  
Through April 6

**BY ELIZABETH HESS**

The installation not to miss this month, also on the subject of identity and gender, is Janet Biggs's "Girls and Horses," an investigation into the Freudian tyranny of the ancient attraction between little females and big equines. This is a must-see for anyone who has ever purchased a stable of My Little Ponys for their offspring. The good news is that Biggs hasn't gone off the deep end, like a few Barbie decon-

structors I have known. She immerses us in this material without drowning us in the obvious. Biggs raises serious questions but with humor, the only way to ride this subject.

The gallery is dark and unsettling. One has to submit to this piece right away, which turns out to be a pleasure. Biggs has taped a few of her buddies playing "horsie" with their young daughters at home. There's no shame

in this activity, but under the artist's lens it becomes a hysterical phallic exercise in absurdity. Watching daddies pretending to be stallions, one can't help but read this masturbatory gesture as one of the most peculiar rites of passage, as harmless as it is seminal.

The critical image in this installation is a larger video loop playing on the gallery walls, enveloping us, and the eight video vignettes, in a master narrative. In *Amanda Riding Diplomaat*, a young girl dressed in proper Pony Club gear is riding a large Arabian in a formal show; we're smack in the center of the ring as Amanda goes around and around as mechanically as the hands on a clock. Playing horsie on the living room floor is the first step on a path that leads to the upper-crust world of horsemanship. For little girls, holding that crop in their hot little hands is not so dissimilar from the grip that little boys can have on their own anatomy. Is it penis envy? I don't think so. It's a way of controlling the beast between your legs called desire—and anyone else who might come too close. ♦