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Emily Speers Mears, artforum.com, June 2004

John Giorno / ext 17
SWISS INSTITUTE
495 Broadway, 3rd floor, 212 925-2035 x17
June 01–June 30

John Giorno's short, brilliant trip of a poem for the Swiss Institute's latest answering-machine "exhibition" evokes a strong sense of place—which is impressive, considering the disembodied nature of the work. The novelty of these telephonic shows (this is part two of an ongoing SI series) hasn't worn off since Giorno came up with the concept of Dial-a-Poem in the '70s, and the convenience of not having to leave your home/office/beach house to hear his latest is as enormously appreciated as ever. But wherever you're calling from, Giorno's glorious, broad Noo Yoik accent places you smack-bang in the middle of the big city. A haven of consumer excess is hymned in the opening description of gift-wrapped presents—the setting could easily be that open-air shopping mall, Broadway, on which the Swiss Institute is located. The poem arcs through this glut of presents and champagne and then droops toward a moment of self-doubt, but Giorno has too deft a touch to allow the experience to deflate altogether. Instead, the poem and its characters float away just as the answering-machine beep cuts in.



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