

The New York Times

Art in Review

By ROBERTA SMITH

Published: April 1, 1994

Kristin Oppenheim 303 Gallery 89 Greene Street (at Spring Street) SoHo
Through April 23

Kristin Oppenheim is a firm believer that less is more. She makes installation pieces that involve nothing but sound, and her sounds tend to be remembered, even rather approximate fragments of popular songs that she sings over and over in a pale, lilting voice without accompaniment. This sounds a lot less like a stuck record than you might imagine.

Her first solo show, following several years of group show appearances, is a four-tape presentation of her rendition of the chorus of "Sail On, Sailor," a relatively obscure song written by Brian Wilson in the 1970's. The tapes are slightly out of sync, which means that the music not only repeats, but also echoes itself endlessly and from different directions, according to where you stand and how much you move around. The results might be likened to a light installation by Robert Irwin, which is to say that there is a soothing, accumulating, almost hypnotic effect that heightens the act of perception. What Mr. Irwin does for the eyes -- creating the sensation that light has been broken down into its constituent units and that one is seeing oneself see -- Ms. Oppenheim achieves for the ears.

In addition, there's the strange emotional pull of Ms. Oppenheim's voice, words and rhythms. They conjure an extreme kind of solitude, that of a teen-ager in her bedroom, or perhaps even an inmate in an asylum, a solitude in which the sound of one's own voice is the only comfort. It's hard to know where she will go from here, but despite its apparent emptiness, her show has a fullness very much its own.