

REGEN PROJECTS

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ART REVIEWS

By SUSAN KANDEL
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

Hurtful Laughter: There is nothing remotely funny about the subject matter: domestic violence, rape, molestation and the less spectacular, but no less insidious, misogyny of everyday life. Yet it is at times quite difficult to hold back laughter in the presence of **Sue Williams'** alternately scathing and haunted work at Stuart Regen Gallery.

It's not the nervous laughter that comes from relief; the dirty jokes Williams shares are already out in the open. Nor is it the laughter of embarrassment; Williams presumes an audience that is more or less beyond shock. What she doesn't presume, however, is an audience that is beyond shame, that is too inured to the institutionalized sexism that often passes for "communication" to see themselves and those they love (or claim to, with their hands tightened into a fist) in her scabrous, urgent and bitter images. So the laugh that comes is one of recognition. And it hurts on its way up

from your throat.

Williams' drawings and paintings look like malignant cartoons, squished full of irregularly scrawled texts and hastily drawn images—most in black, white and beige, one with nasty accents in red, another in a noxious tone of yellow. "No, No, No—No Means No," shouts one image, oozing self-esteem as preached by self-help manuals and Oprah Winfrey; meanwhile, the words "HA HA HA" surround it with cool viciousness. "Mom, A Role Model" is the label assigned to an image of a woman on her knees with a toilet strapped to her back, her husband blithely urinating into it. Another image depicts a woman, sprawled on the subway stairs face down, her pants pulled around her ankles; she is "a victim for you—or it's you." A man and a woman run toward one another. She says: "I am beautiful and lovable." He says: "You should meet my mom. She's a fat pig, too."

Spelled out in tiny letters above an image of a large pair of flabby thighs is the phrase "This Is (Art) Not Social Commentary." Williams' work powerfully insists that this distinction has for too long served the forces of reaction.

■ *Stuart Regen Gallery, 619 N. Almont Drive, (310) 276-5424, through Dec. 5. Closed Sunday and Monday.*