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Debbie (left) and unidentified beauty contest entrant

'Beauty' Comes To the Gardens

IT'S STILL FRIDAY, October 20, 1978 — the Night of the Living Dead.

The intrepid Gary Fong, notorious Chronicle *paparazzo*, and your humble travel agent have already done the Hooker's Ball VIP Party at the Cow and the Rock and Roll Clones at the Waldorf.

The World's Oldest Profession and the World's Oddest Profession.

Now it's time to go to work. "Enough of this Middle America crap," Fong bellows, pulling on the formica-surgery nose of an ersatz Elvis Presley. "Let's get down."

"Cut the scrutable number, Fong," I bark, "or I'll have you busted back to taking mugs for the Question Man."

I check my "Weekly Bay Area Outrageous Beauty Contest" press release. "This cult series," it says, "will provide a showcase for new talent, with large doses of tackiness and bad taste."

"All right!" Fong howls, dousing his Kodak Instamatic with yet another bottle of 7-Up.

We enter the Mabuhay Gardens, hard by the corner of Broadway and Montgomery. Ordinarily, the Mabuhay is a serene and genteel site, a punk-rock Lourdes featuring nothing more bizarre than the traditional chicken decapitations and unison vomiting.

But a couple of weeks ago, a Berkeley commune-collective, the Theater of Human Melting, staged the "First Bay Area Outrageous Beauty Contest" at the Mabuhay and the resultant inundation of freaks, exhibitionists and the seriously deranged was so heartening that the event has become a weekly one.

As we sat down, taking care to avoid the tidy piles of refuse everywhere, a master and mistress of ceremonies wobbled to stage right as a crew of derelicts laid a plastic covering on the floor. "Before Anne does her exotic act," the master announced somberly, "she asks that you refrain from licking."

Without a word, I got up and prepared to depart. "Where are you going?" Fong cried, dropping his light meter in a hibachi.

"The press," I said, "will not be shackled. I would rather see Myron Farber rot in jail than acquiesce to such pre-conditions."

HE SAID 'LICKING,' round eyes," Fong said-dryly, "not 'looking.' "

"Oh."

Jane waddled on stage, attired in an overextended bikini, and commenced to spray herself, the floor and the ecstatic ringsiders with whipped cream. The audience cheered.

"That's what I would call an ocean of calamine lotion," the m.c. observed.

Then all the contestants lined up on stage. Unfortunately, we had missed the previous orchestrations, but the contestants numbered five — four women and one man with cerebral palsy. "He sang 'With a Little Help From My Friends,' sort of a Joe Cocker imitation," I was told.

Drat. I always miss the good stuff.

After a winner had been declared (it had something to do with dicing a dildo in a Cuisinart), Debbie, a Melting Theater spokessette, explained that "We want to put on a show where people can have fun and do anything. Fun is weird."

She promised if I came back another time, I might be able to watch Steve eating spaghetti on the floor. "He says if you feel you can't laugh, it's best to leave."

How true.

"Maybe we could go to Tommaso's and pick up some spaghetti out-takes there," Fong said helpfully. "Who would know the difference?"

It's now midnight. We head back for the Hooker's Ball. The floor of the Cow Palace is teeming with fruitcakes. Thousands peer and parade to the tune of political harangues and rock and roll. We split a half hour later.

I can hardly wait for Halloween.