

SCENES

Close-Encounter Group

Abducted by aliens? At artist and UFO observer Budd Hopkins' Chelsea get-togethers, you can talk it over with others

By LEWIS BEALE/Daily News Staff Writer

They're discussing implants. The kind extraterrestrials put in your body after they've abducted you, probed you with weird instruments, then dumped you back on Planet Earth.

We're in the Chelsea townhouse of artist Budd Hopkins, the garrulous, avuncular point man for the nationwide underground of alien-abduction true believers. And we are surrounded by Hopkins' work: large geometrical paintings, abstract wooden sculptures and shelves filled with unsold expressionist works in bright colors.

Meanwhile, 63-year-old Hopkins is holding up an X-ray of an 11-year-old girl's skull, which he claims shows something mighty weird behind the eye socket. Crowded around him are 15 white middle-class folks, totally normal (well, maybe one or two are a planet short of a solar system), all of them alleged abductees, straining mightily to see what Hopkins sees.

Watching the skies

And there is something there, a mass of who knows what, which these members of Hopkins' alien-abduction support group take as further proof that they're here, they're messing with us, so why don't you believe us?

"Do people feel their implants?" asks one. "Do people feel numb at the sight of their implants?" wonders another. And: "Has anyone had implants in their earlobes?"

Are these folks seriously deluded, or ahead of the curve on the biggest story in the history of the solar system?

"This isn't being curious about some humped fish swimming around in a lake in Scotland," says Hopkins. "This changes everything. All human history will be measured before and after this kind of contact."

Hopkins, a respected painter whose work is in the permanent collections of the Whitney and Guggenheim museums (among others), jumped feet first into the UFO/abduction controversy in 1975, after investigating reports of a close encounter in a New Jersey park. Hopkins' story of the sighting ran in the Village Voice and other publications, and before you could say "watch the skies," he had received mail from hundreds of alleged abductees and spaceship sighters.

Twenty years later, Hopkins has in-

terviewed more than 1,000 potential abductees (he has identified more than 400 people he assumes are abductees), written two books, and now runs The Intruder Foundation out of his home — it's a nonprofit organization dedicated to researching UFO phenomena, providing support services for abductees and educating the public on the subject.

Hopkins has been in the public eye lately because of "Abduction," a book by Harvard Prof. John E. Mack (Scribners, \$22), which takes the abduction experience at face value. Hopkins introduced Mack to most of the abductees he interviewed, and the book is dedicated to him.

Hopkins himself has never been abducted, but says he had a UFO sighting in the 1960s. He's an engaging and likeable advocate with a sense of humor. That he does not take himself too seriously distinguishes him from many of the members of his support group, who range from interesting and thoughtful to frighteningly obsessed.

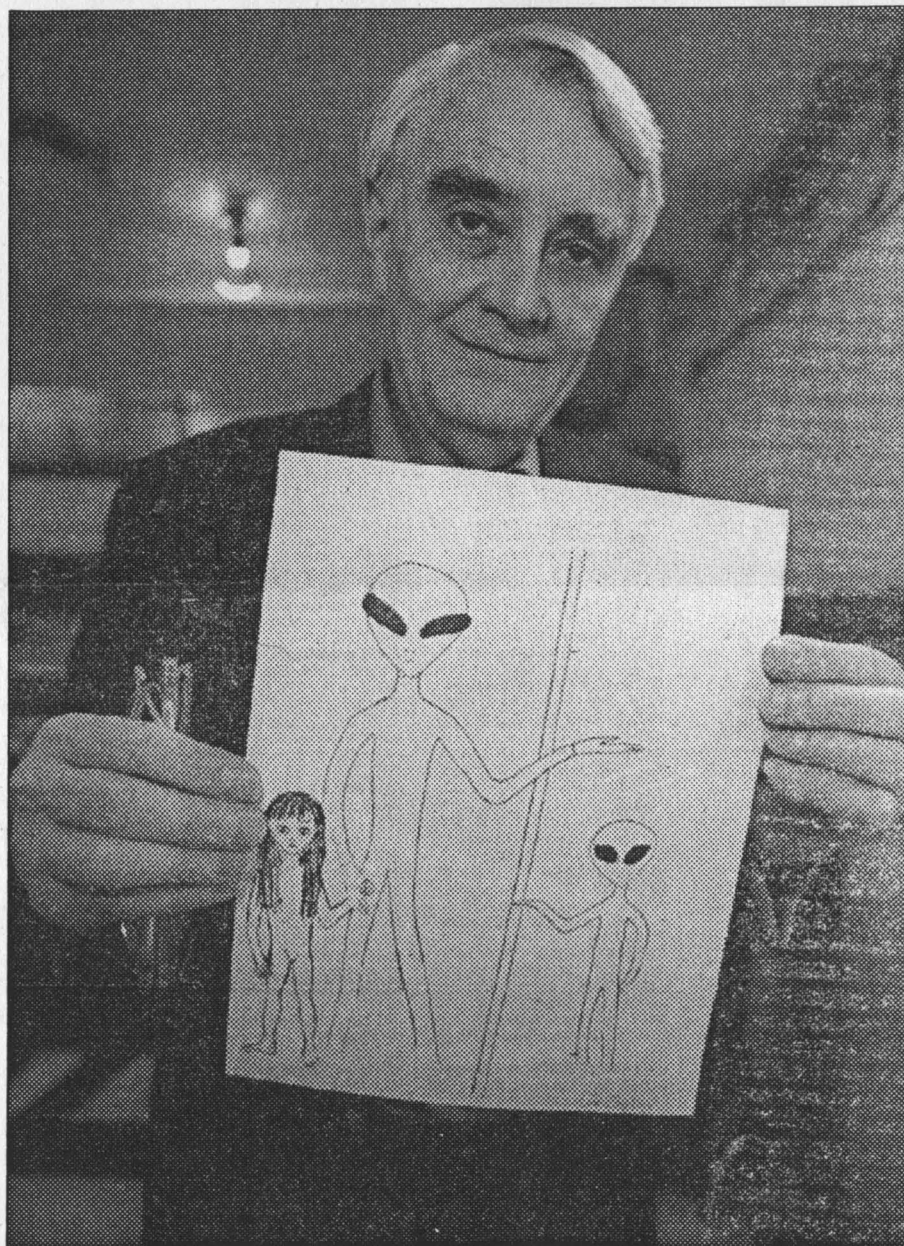
Take Janice (names have been changed), who says her abduction has made her so pro-ecology that she actually wishes most of the people on the planet would die, "so we could start all over again" in a natural way.

Thanks for sharing, Janice.

Then there's Karen, twentysomething and articulate, who describes a dream she had as a kid that she recently remembered under hypnosis. The dream begins with her lying in a cornfield; then she's on the floor of a room, and "the gray guys are there." A horse comes in, drops dead, and a machine strips the skin from it. An eyeball is removed, and put in a box. "The feeling I got was the mutilations were for some sort of monitoring purpose," says Karen.

Karen thinks this dream is related to her abduction, and who's to argue? She's obviously not crazy. Still, Dr. Michael D. Yapko, author of "Suggestions of Abuse" (Simon & Schuster, \$22), says people like Karen "are looking for answers to the most fundamental questions, and they are willing to accept anything that is plausible, even if it isn't true. It's a matter of faith, not science."

Faith is a big thing with Hopkins and his followers, who tend to fixate on the strangest things. Like the T-shirt Hopkins passes around bearing the lo-



BEINGS THERE: Budd Hopkins, with drawing by alleged UFO abductee

go "13th Tsukuba Marathon." Hopkins says an abductee woke up wearing it, but that she had gone to bed wearing something entirely different. Can anyone identify it? The support group members tug, poke and fondle it as if it were a precious artifact.

Signs of Intelligent life?

Sit around with these folks for a few hours, and you're seriously conflicted. Hopkins tells endless abduction tales filled with the kind of evidentiary minutiae that can produce an REM state in any listener. And his followers spend a lot of time discussing dreams (are they evidence of abduction?), hypnotherapy sessions and anomalous behavior: watches running weirdly, bread rising at the wrong time.

After awhile the stories get boring, the riffs more convoluted, the behavior way too "Twilight Zone." But then you think: There's something going on, and

you don't know what it is, do you, Mr. Journalist?

And that's all Budd Hopkins is saying. If there's intelligent life in the universe, and some of it is cruising Earth, then maybe some E.T.'s are abducting humans for — What? Gene splicing? Torture? Cheap sex?

If it's really happening, then shouldn't investigating the occurrences be a top scientific priority?

"We are calling for a gathering of information, and a focusing of attention," says Keith Ferrell, editor of Omni magazine, which is running a six-month series investigating the UFO/abductee phenomenon. "There are plenty of good scientific minds out there who can take a hard look at this and get the sensationalism out of the way."

Says Hopkins: "I'm not going to defend my generalship in this. I'm not trying to be George Washington, I'm trying to be Paul Revere."