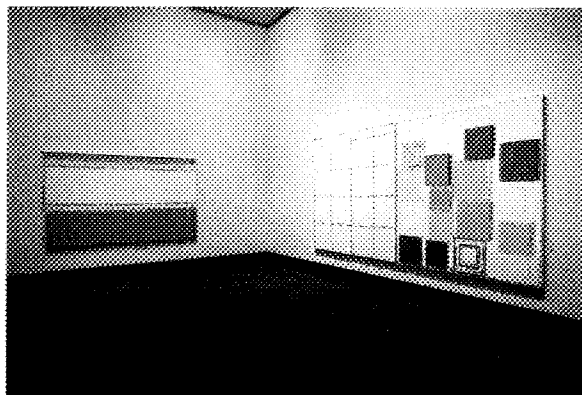


REVIEWS



WILLEM VOLKERSZ
The Rescue of Bambi's Friends,
2000. Wood, acrylic, neon,
found objects, 68" x 65" x 9".



DAN WALSH
left: *Vehicle*, 2000. Acrylic on canvas,
55" x 90".
right: *Untitled*, 2000. Acrylic on canvas,
two panels, 70" x 70" each.

INDIANA

WILLEM VOLKERSZ

INDIANA STATE UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY
7TH AND CHESTNUT STS.
TERRE HAUTE, 47809
812/237-3720

Willem Volkersz has been collecting folk art for a quarter of a century. An early collector of Howard Finster's work, he toured the South during the 1970s and '80s building his collection, which in turn traveled the West during the 1990s as the exhibition "The Radiant Object." His work as a curator of self-taught artists has carried over into his own artistic production, which aspires to a naïveté that it does not achieve. The autobiographical narratives comprising most of the present show, "Domestic Neon," do attain a kind of candor, but it is clearly a studied simplicity.

The show included 14 assemblages and 18 drawings by Volkersz. The former chart the artist's development of a signature formula over the past decade, dominated by the most recent of these narratives in which bodies outlined in neon float against large, idyllic landscapes rendered in a paint-by-number style and palette. A variety of found objects, often vintage kitsch, adhere to the background panels or rest on

shelves extending from the flatly painted forests. Minor changes are wrung from this formula, as when chalkboards replace the paint-by-number landscapes.

In sculptural assemblages like *Home Fires* from 1990 and *Family Portrait* from 1993, smaller neon icons are supported by step-ladders, chairs, and suitcases hand-crafted of wood in a clean, simple style. The motif of the suitcase as a key element of the household no doubt alludes to immigration, but it also points to another sort of travel in which the commercial and the familial so often intersect: tourism.

The theme of travel in Volkersz's art is inseparable from his practice of collecting. One might expect his work to reflect some nervousness about the artist as tourist, especially since that equation renders folk-art works little more than souvenirs. But one finds instead confident expressions of nostalgia that make his studied artlessness a touchstone for sincerity. Volkersz reveals his romanticized view of his own work when he says that "a paint-by-number landscape can be read as an idealized visionary place which is impossible to reach." Volkersz's appeal to folk tactics reflects a desire for simplicity, but the work cannot obscure the complexity of the cultural exchanges—such as that between artist and collector—from which it emerged.

Kevin Marzahl is writing a dissertation on epistemological provocations.

DAN WALSH

INDIANAPOLIS MUSEUM OF ART
1200 W. 38TH ST., 46208
317/923-1331

It seemed unlikely that New York artist Dan Walsh would find receptive audiences in Indianapolis. His artwork is just the kind Midwest art viewers love to hate—it's frustratingly abstract, and simplistically cryptic—and it's the kind of artwork curators love to love. The curators of this show thus had a formidable task at hand in convincing visitors that Walsh has something compelling to say.

Are color-field paintings best left to their Modernist originators, or is there still something to say using the basic building blocks of this form? Walsh's canvases are tightly composed yet expansive juxtapositions of floating squares neatly lined up. His hues never quite sink into the canvas, yet their lightness is part of their charm. His series of six large paintings contains pastels, primary colors, and combinations of both that are unlike the rich, sustaining tones employed by the progenitors of color-field painting. Walsh's pastels float rather than overwhelm, their weightlessness seeming literally to play on color-field painting's lofty ideas about visual saturation. An occasional shock of red wakes up the canvases, and viewers' psyches.

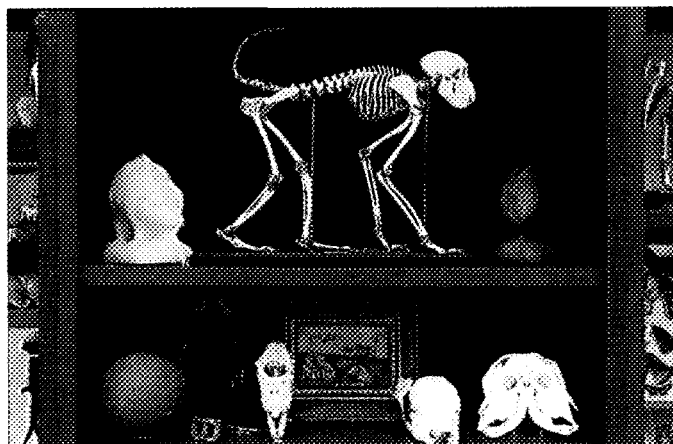
Walsh's paintings present a wealth of possibilities concerning the psychology of

REVIEWS

MARK DION

Cabinet of the Terrestrial Realm
(detail), 2001.

Mixed media, dimensions variable.



art. *Example* looks like a four-eyed machine with two sky-blue gaping mouths, as if to say, "Technology will eat you up!" We all know it already has, but viewers are left wondering whether this is indeed the kind of pondering Walsh wishes to inspire. *Vehicle* is more obvious, and quiet: instead of squares, a white track runs horizontally across the canvas with bands of bluish gray bordering its edges, flanked by a shoulder of violet purple. It seems to say, "Hit the road, and it could take you anywhere—or you could take it anywhere."

Curator Lena Vigna admits in her catalogue essay that Walsh's paintings are "ambiguous," and it is just that ambiguity that makes them compelling. Because the work is abstract, based on placing simple shapes in and out of relation to one another, any larger, non-formal intentions the artist may have are unclear. Walsh achieves that aesthetic mystery for which artists continue to strive, offending some and comforting others. But Walsh is saying something with his blocks of color, even if we're not quite sure what it is. In the end, while nonfigurative, Walsh's paintings still inspire sensual empathy—after all, lines and squares can represent people too, or at least they remind us that it's what we do with them that counts.

Julie Pratt McQuiston is editor-in-chief of Arts Indiana in her home city of Indianapolis.

MINNESOTA

MARK DION

FREDRICK R. WEISMAN ART MUSEUM
333 E. RIVER RD.
MINNEAPOLIS, 55455
612/625-9494

Pleasure as much as science was the motivation behind grouping mastodon tusks from one of the largest prehistoric elephants ever found in North America with radiant nineteenth-century botanical prints of lilies. These and other objects like jewelry, taxidermied animals, and plant specimens shared Mark Dion's "Cabinet of Curiosities," the artist's first project in the Twin Cities.

Drawing from a wide range of collections at the University of Minnesota, Dion and his student collaborators organized nearly 600 objects according to themes based on Renaissance ideas of how the world is structured. The viewer was engrossed by the sheer variety of Dion's objects, arranged in cabinets under suggestive thematic headings like "Underworld," "Sea," "Terrestrial Realm," and "Allegory." These nineteenth-century-style *Wunderkammern* (literally "wonder chambers") lined one wall of the gallery, while the opposite wall was reminiscent of a Victorian salon.

Assembled by devoted amateurs, the original curiosity cabinets drew no distinction between the arts and the sciences. An etching might be displayed alongside a selection of rare musical instruments, taxidermic samples, and other marvels of natural history. Caught in the historical shift from an age of wonder to the Age of Reason, the *Wunderkammern*'s significance hovered between the theological, the scientific, and the aesthetic.

Today this conceptual flexibility seems pointedly contemporary. But whereas the original cabinets aimed to instill a sense of awe before the mysteries of the world, Dion wants us to analyze the techniques and narratives of display. In particular he probes the classifying systems that shape our knowledge and memory of nature.

Of course, one of the techniques of display resides in Dion himself, the itinerant artist who travels from museum to museum providing his critical-art services. Rather than some hieratic mystery, his art is treated as just another part of contemporary visual culture. Nonetheless, the artist-as-arranger remains the principle progenitor of meaning. Dion's devotion to detritus and ephemera is appealing and affecting, but the viewer's own experience is somewhat displaced. In a certain sense we are denied wonder, only to witness Dion himself salvaging these objects from the basements of university collections, reanimating them while he obstinately protests their categorization.

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