

For immediate release

MARK DION

The Curiosity Shop

November 19, 2005 to January 14, 2006

Opening reception November 19 2005, 6- 8pm

Tanya Bonakdar Gallery is very pleased to present Mark Dion's 'The Curiosity Shop,' the gallery's third solo exhibition with the artist.

Mark Dion's dynamic and conceptually rigorous art making practice primarily serves as an investigation of the historical methods of representing and organizing the world, with a particular sensitivity to man's sometimes-tenuous relationship with nature. This analysis is often infused with a parallel stream of study that includes images and material culled from the realm of popular culture. Juxtaposing these forms in uncanny ways, Dion's collections identify and connect peoples of vastly disparate cultures and times, and in so doing, his works reveal the underlying universal commonality of humankind.

This singular, large-scale installation continues Dion's investigation into the blurred boundaries between art, science, nature and the methods of their presentation and interpretation. Dion has previously utilized cabinets and vitrines as mediators of many concerns central to his practice: from questions of taxonomy and classification, to the surrealist's interest in exalting the ordinary as strange. *The Curiosity Shop* confronts the inherent contradictions between the artifact and the context in which it is displayed for popular consumption, in the shape of a haunting, architecturally scaled, rural 'museum' of curiosities.

Desire and Accessibility

The bountiful and precisely arranged contents of Mark Dion's 'The Curiosity Shop' serves, like the greatest Cabinets of Curiosity, as a microcosm of the universe, or, a map of the human mind's understanding of the universe. More specifically, this mosaic of images and memorabilia allows, perhaps, a glimpse into the construction of Mark Dion's mind, layered with meaning from the autobiographical to the universal, from the superficially obvious, to the subtle, to the profound. Inspired by any number of real antique shops located in remote areas, 'The Curiosity Shop' is a small lodge built in the New England vernacular style, filled with a dazzling array of small collectable items for visual consumption, and potential possession. But alas, with no one attending the shop, its front door padlocked, lacking any contact numbers, hours or even months of operating time, the shop becomes no more than still life - an object of desire a thousand times over. Dion filters this common experience through his practice of 'display as narrative,' and suggests the history of possession, ownership, value and display of the encyclopedic variety.

Indeed, 'The Curiosity Shop' encompasses much of Mark Dion's institutional critique of the museum and references to the history of possession, display, and symbolic value. In Medieval times, the object of value was collected and hoarded by the owner. The power of the object was found intrinsically in its material and would give its benefits to the collector, or owner, alone. Its power could be exploited, enjoyed or bartered but it mainly became something to simply be 'counted' as a measure of the owner's wealth. This concept of wealth later shifted, during the Renaissance, when what Dion refers to as the concept of 'bling' first gained currency. Owners and collectors came to understand the power of display and conspicuous consumption.

Systems of Organization and Taxonomy

Following his acceptance of the shop as unattainable, the visitor is seduced by the act of looking and Dion presents a visual array of object-oriented, even fetishistically-obsessive, material upon which to gaze, interpret and comprehend. Beyond the mere representation of an organized thrift-store, 'The Curiosity Shop' presents a veritable lexicon of imagery, iconography and information that the visitor can endlessly decode.

Within the shop, there are cabinets dedicated to the Elements (Earth, Wind, Fire, Heavens and Hell) which are represented by ceramic gardens, mushroom patch salt shakers, small glass vases with flower reliefs that represent Earth; fans and butterflies which represent the Air; dozens of statuettes of Greco-Roman gods mingle with plastic Casper the friendly ghost figurines to represent Heaven, etc. A cabinet is dedicated to the each of the human senses; and another to Artifice (a coffee can of paint brushes and drawing inks, transportation, writing utensils - all suggesting how man represents the world). A barrel of long handled instruments seems to be categorized by material and form as axes and hoes mingle with a baseball bat and fishing rod, (perhaps work and recreation). There is a portrait of the founder of the modern zoo, the displayer of animals on display to be looked at himself through the frame of a window for time immemorial. This is further evidence that each object was selected carefully, collected intentionally, not to merely take up space, but to play a role in the narrative of the world that Dion was planning to construct.

Equally significant, the shop can be read as a kind of mini-museum that references Dion's own prolific career and epic body of work. There's a wheelbarrow filled with stuffed animals (see also 'Wheels of Progress' series), a table filled with ceramic birds (see also 'Library for the Birds of Antwerp', 'Notes Towards a Field Guide to the Birds of Art Institute of Chicago,' or 'Bird Blind for Madison Square Park, New York' or many more); a shelf of now illegal pesticide dispersal utensils (see also the Museum of Poison); a large synthetic shark; numerous insect catching and bird watching paraphernalia; key rings... etc.

In addition, works conceived as an epilogue to Dion's *Rescue Archeology, A Project for the Museum of Modern Art* at The Museum of Modern Art are exhibited in the small gallery. Unlike legitimate archaeological excavations, Dion's have little real scientific value. Often enlisting the assistance of the public in the act of creating his work Dion demystifies cultural institutions where these processes normally take place and illuminates the strategies that underlie curatorship and taxonomy.

Perhaps most literal and illuminating in this respect is a suite of 4 prints that Dion made in collaboration with the printmaker, Robert Williams. Each print of the suite features a tree as symbolic form for organizing a series of terms representing ideas from various cultures and civilizations - roots, trunk, branches and leaves display a pattern of understanding that transcends any one culture, but allows instead a glimpse into how man has always, and continues, to represent and rationalize the world in which we live.

Mark Dion's recent solo exhibitions include *Microcosmographia* a survey exhibition of selected projects to date at the South London Gallery, London (2005); Salon de Chasse, Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, Chateau de Chambord, France (2005); *Projects 82: Rescue Archeology, A Project for the Museum of Modern Art*, MoMA, New York (2004); *Tropical Travels, Thomas Ender (1817-1818) and Mark Dion (2003)*, Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna (2004). Dion will also be the subject of a solo exhibition at the Miami Art Museum (2006) and present 'Seattle Vivarium', as part of *I AM SAM*, Olympic Sculpture Park, Seattle Art Museum (2006).

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