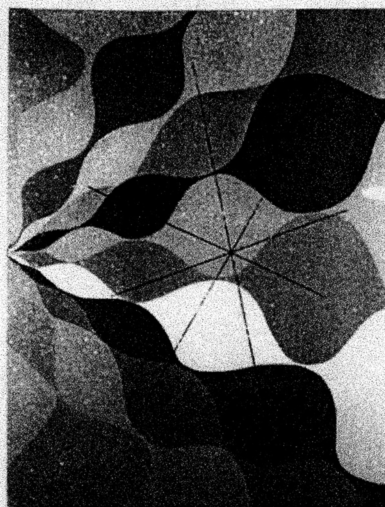
MARK DAGLEY

EARL MCGRATH GALLERY

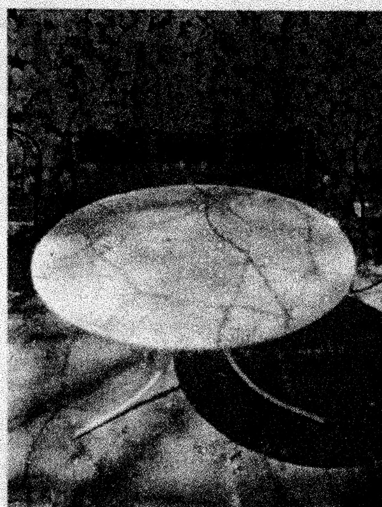
Mark Dagley has long explored the language of painting by playing with both surfaces and supports. He has made torqued monochromes, eccentric shaped canvases, paintings with blocks cut out of them, and wall sculptures of exposed stretcher bars, all with a characteristically wry sensibility. His most recent series of paintings represents something of a departure. Though he continues to raise questions about painting, he now does so without breaking it down into its constituent parts.

Combining the flat colors and taped-canvas edges of the Washington Color School (Gene Davis, Kenneth Noland, and Morris Louis, among others) with designs reminiscent of '60s and '70s supergraphics, the new paintings are so familiar they almost seem like old news. Dagley makes no attempt to bowl the viewer over with either scale or craftsmanship; never larger than life-size, the canvases are covered in only a few coats of paint, the taped edges often left raggedy. Yet this work has undeniable wit and power. In *Vanishing Point*, 1994, alternating stripes of red, yellow, and blue converge at the painting's lower left-hand corner to suggest a skewed, boxy version of Raymond Loewy's Shell Oil logo. The arbitrariness of the work's vanishing point and its bizarre diagonal emphasis go against the conventions of both "good design" and the tenets of Color Field painting as if to suggest that the ideals that informed both practices are hopelessly stodgy. In *We Are Not Alone*, 1995, Dagley takes the affront even further by violating a cheerful pattern of ballooning curves with an incongruous black asterisk (made by pressing an inked edge of corrugated cardboard against the surface of the canvas).

Dagley removes supergraphics from the realm of advertising and Color Field painting from the realm of formalism, mobilizing them in the service of lived experience. In *Concentric Sequence*, 1996, what could have been a purist dot pattern becomes a reflection of self-imposed, ritualized labor: an enormous, tightly wound spiral of circles that gradually increase from a few millimeters in diameter in the canvas' center to an inch-and-a-half at its edge. The lightly penciled circles are filled in with acrylic paint in a repeated color sequence of red, blue, and yellow so that from the beginning of the spiral to its end chains of Mondrian-colored dots radiate in all directions. The overall effect of these zigzags



Mark Dagley, *We Are Not Alone*, 1995, oil and acrylic on canvas, 82 x 64".



Simone Kappeler, *Garden Table #9*, 1995, black and white photograph. From "The Eye of the Beholder."

Adja Yunkers, 196

(which merge the contemplative pull of an Eastern mandala with the stroboscopic pulse of a deranged optical experiment) couldn't have been fully anticipated until the piece was finished, and the viewer has the sense of discovering something right along with the artist. This is one of the many ways in which Dagley reanimates visual forms long considered obsolete.

—*Tom Moody*

"THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER: SEVEN CONTEMPORARY SWISS PHOTOGRAPHERS"

SWISS INSTITUTE

Writing in *The Village Voice* at the height of the culture wars in this country, Michael Feingold made a modest proposal that U.S. artists and writers apply en masse for sanctuary in Switzerland. His comment wryly reveals some of the stereotypes Americans reflexively invoke to characterize all things Swiss: cool detachment and political neutrality.

Stereotypes always obscure more than they reveal. Although "Swiss photography" is generally thought to flow from the reportage of earlier masters such as Werner Bischof and Walter Bosshard, the most emotionally expressive and politically direct (nonneutral) photographic work of this or any other period was produced by a Swiss immigrant to New York named Robert Frank.

"The Eye of the Beholder," organized by the Swiss Federal Office of Culture and the Swiss Institute in New York, managed to complicate stereotypes surrounding Swiss photography and culture. Contrary to the sense of individuality invoked by the title, the seven artists in the show do have certain traits in common. They all share a serial tendency in their practice—returning again to one subject or object over time—and an interiority of focus, avoiding the grand themes of the past in their acknowledgment of the limitations of both their era and photography itself.

Simone Kappeler's series of photographs of a garden table taken at regular intervals over a year's time is more elemental (fundamental and essentialist) than conceptual (relying on general ideas derived from a specific instance), yet more subjective than objective. The simple round white tabletop with its splayed legs is deadpan funny at first, and then acquires a lunar intensity as its reflective surface becomes a scrying screen. In contrast to the brightness of Kappeler's moon table, Hans Danuser's large square pictures in a grid were as dark as the back of a mirror. Knowing that these images record the effects of erosion on slate in a gully in eastern Switzerland did little to alleviate the monotony of the images. This was not true of Bernard Voïta's miniaturist faux-architectural photographs, where the beholder's eyes have room to roam in imaginary spaces that are purely photographic.

In Jacques Berthet's solemn images of the marble quarries of Carrara, Italy, the special relationship between photography and sculpture—one explored by artists from Fox Talbot through Robert Mapplethorpe—was accentuated. Through close attention to shifts in scale and the play of light on surfaces, Berthet transformed the raw material of the quarries into faceted monuments. Thomas

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