

## Dirk Skreber at Friedrich Petzel

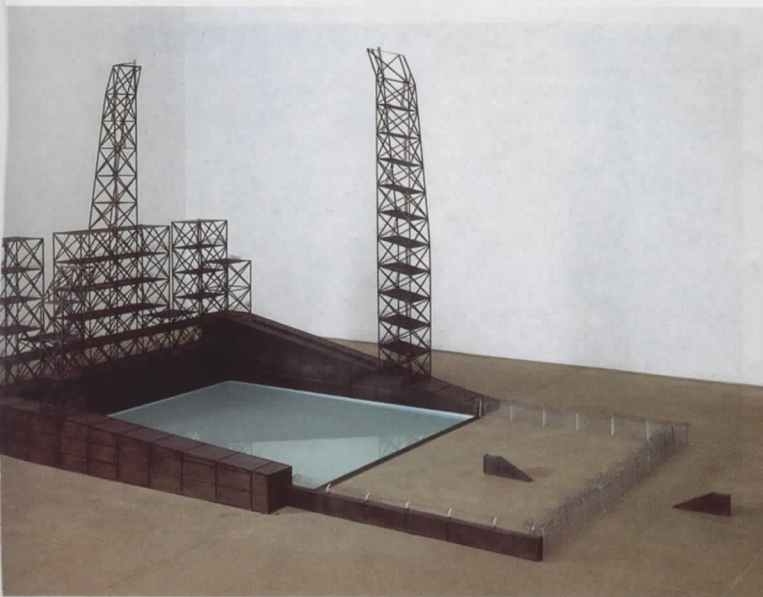
Having exhibited widely in Europe, Düsseldorf-based Dirk Skreber recently made his New York solo debut with a show consisting of three enormous oils (99 by 158 inches each) derived from magazine and Internet photographs, and a fourth, quite different canvas of the same size that related to a sculptural installation in the gallery's back room. The five works, all 2004, had in common an eerie, oppressive stillness and sense of dread.

The photographic nature of the source material for *Untitled (NowhereLand)* dominates the painting, an arresting image of a flooded interchange on a rural expressway, in bright daylight, with nobody in sight. The motif is framed from an aerial vantage point. The foliage is cursory, as if the artist were cleaning his brushes, but the receding watery plane that stretches across the canvas is quite beautiful, a delicate blue-gray across the top of the picture sinking to murky bronzy greens along the bottom. It is sliced through by curling, chalky bands of roadway. The lagoon within the loop formed by each flooded approach ramp is filled with an unexpected and unidentifiable black oval. Another work renders a tiny island surrounded by flecked, reef-lined waters and marked by weirdly fleshy-colored thatched-roof huts. The village is unpeopled, which makes it spooky. A tarry beach sets off the pink and green landmass from the encircling azure sea, isolating it like a scab.

The installation, *Untitled (Fountain of Youth 3.0)*—made of painted wood, wire, Plexiglas, paint, aluminum, water—resembled a scale model of a prison camp enclosing a square pool of water on three sides; the fourth side is blocked off by a chain link-type fence a few inches high made of screening material. The chunk of gallery floor that was removed to create the depression for the pool was laid conspicuously to one side. A boxy, low-lying structure about 2 feet tall was surmounted by precarious, spindly towers outfitted with tiny ladders rising to a height of 6 feet. Its black and charcoal palette and suggestion of the dehumanizing effects of militarism linked it to the painting *Untitled (Camouflage Battledress)* in which sections of a schematically rendered battleship are deployed among splayed furrows of gummy, stenciled black paint.

Of all the pieces in this unsettling show, the untitled painting that apparently depicts the ruins of a mountainside settlement or island village provides the richest contrast of inert and lucid surfaces, and the most enigmatic spatial structure. The lower third of the canvas is the unmistakable blue of tropical waters, the density of which diminishes upon upward-sweeping contact with sand and land. The middle third might be the encrusted remains of a toxic tide, in pasty tints of grays and greens with repellent greenish-back blobs again evoking tar or sludge. Above a soft-focus mountain peak, an expanse of moodier blue rushes back into space. According to gallery information,

Dirk Skreber: *Untitled (Fountain of Youth 3.0)*, 2004, painted wood, wire, Plexiglas, paint, aluminum, water, approx. 6 by 7 by 6 feet; at Friedrich Petzel.



Virgil Marti: *Landscape Wallpaper with Stars* 2001, screenprinted fluorescent and rayon at Elizabeth Dee.

Skreber claims to be unconcerned with subject matter per se. But the imagery he works with inevitably conveys an ominous view of the world and our stewardship of it.

—Stephen Maine

## Virgil Marti at Elizabeth Dee

When, in the not-too-distant future, glossy shelter magazines feature moon-base decor, there's a good chance the photo spreads will resemble mixed-medium artist Virgil Marti's exhibition of seven high-concept artworks—that is, of course, if the tastes of tomorrow's decorators are as steeped as Marti's in cheesy science fiction, 19th-century French literature and the history of interior design. In this rather arch show, clunky *Star Trek* sets combined with Rodeo Drive chic to generate a low-grade commercial buzz laden with an overabundance of historical and cultural allusions.

The centerpiece of the exhibition (all works 2004) was a quintet of wall-mounted sculptures, or "sconces," fashioned out of white plastic, foam, and faceted, mirrored Plexiglas cut to resemble oversize tortoise shells. Instead of tapers, however, these fixtures—bearing colorful titles like *Electric Blue Apogee* and *Kurious Oranji*—held metallized and rhinestone-encrusted cacti, cast-resin flowers and illuminated chrome-capped bulbs. The references here ranged from Tiffany lamps to the esthetic cloister of J.-K. Huysmans's 1896 *A Rebours*, a classic novel of decadence. Adding to the sense of airlessness was the wall of Escher-like wallpaper, based on a photograph of the lunar surface.

Reprising, in a way, his triumphant installation *Grow Room 3* from the 2004 Whitney Biennial,