

BIRDSPACE

A POST-AUDUBON ARTISTS AVIARY



EUGENE JAMES MARTIN

ORNITHOLOGY

SATIRICAL GAMING - The final group in the exhibition accepts the bird as an ever-present element of popular culture, and uses this idea as a point of departure for toying or gaming with viewer's perceptions. Amy Jean Porter's installation, composed of cartoonish drawings of birds uttering lyrics of hip-hop music, is an intentional parody of Audubon; viewers are challenged to identify names of birds as well as lyrics of songs. A similar conceptual hunting for imagery occurs in the pattern paintings of Ben Sneed, where birds appropriated from field guides become purely decorative elements. The birds in Ann Craven's paintings recall those of popular calendars or boutique items, as her primary interest is in the blurred distinctions between real nature and its artificial representation in popular media. Wim Delvoye similarly employs visual contradiction in leather-bound birdhouses that draw parallels between the mating of birds and human sexual practices. John Salvest also toys humorously with viewer perception, in an installation of artificial birds on wires accompanied by fake bird sounds. If viewers don't get the point, they can read the letters formed by the placement of the birds—which spell out the word 'FLY'.

ORNITHOLOGY EUGENE JAMES MARTIN

01.25.05 - 04.10.05

Born in 1938 - Washington D.C. Martin's mother died in 1943. At five years old Martin was put in a foster home, where over the next two years he bounced in and out of homes. Once he ran away to the Capitol where he sat on the grand cascading white steps. When the guards found him, he was taken back to his foster home. After running away again he was sent to reform school. Later Martin spent fifteen years on a farm in Maryland where he found solace amongst the chickens, cows, horses and tractors. There he drew animals, worked on farm equipment and built corn sheds. In 1960 he enrolled at the Corcoran School Of Art in Washington and completed his art education in 1963.

Martin's work has been exhibited nationally in such places as Washington D.C., North Carolina and New York. His international exhibitions include Belgium, France and the Museum of Modern Art in Munich, Germany. Eugene Martin passed away peacefully at his home with his wife Suzanne Fredericq on January 1, 2005. He was a wonderfully prolific artist filled with humor and kindness. His life growing up orphaned was a struggle, but you would have never known it. He was a brave man and it showed in his work.

Eugene once said to me about his most recent works that "(he) was trying to do with paint what your not supposed to do". I was sort of shocked! And it was true. These canvasses embody an awkward coexistence of palpant cogency with incongruent conviction: Vibrant fields of sticky colors, jelled against cool geometric shapes, which overlay calico brush strokes and brindled meanderings. Some of these works are very complex while others are pure autonomic marks similar to Chinese characters or hieroglyphs. They are truly brave paintings with incredible sophistication and shrewdness.

Similarly, Martin's lyrical ink and graphite drawings employ an automatist approach to composition and mark making. These economized works culminate to an instant of perfect balance - a moment in time where all the working parts are in-synch with its whole.

One element that seems to run throughout Martin's forty years of work is the physical and psychological mechanics of the body/mind. Whether spirited in animals or manifested through abstraction, they are about ourselves: our neurosis; the dreams we hope for; how we eat.... Ultimately though, they reveal our resistance to escape the gravitational pull of stillness - the inevitable conclusion to life.

Eugene never bothered with titling works unless they were purchased or selected to be exhibited, in which case, he often named them on the spot. With such titles as "A Sea of Politicians with Lots of Wiggle Room" and "I am Not a Mocking Bird," we are invited to ponder these often humorous poetic equations. With the exception of five works on view, are all untitled and have never been publicly exhibited.

- Brian Guidry