

an R. & W. Berries, Co., figurine peers sadly from this primordial muck.

As in other work by Marti, the relationship of art and decoration resonates throughout this piece. It is consciously present in the pattern of the landscape—not a vista, but rather a discrete scene that joins seamlessly with itself and repeats a dozen plus times around the room. A manageable gesture spun into monumentality, it is wallpaper as an automatic (or mindless) response to horror vacui. The repetition provides an interesting contrast: As paradise multiplies around the room, hell sits in the

center—singular, unique, and ominous.

The installation includes a number of references to the art of the past, building a kind of abbreviated aesthetic codex: The wallpaper's stars and mushrooms directly allude to architectural details found in the Academy's historic 125 year-old building (designed by Frank Furness and George Hewitt); the idealized landscape is an acknowledgment of the exotic painted paradise typical of 19th century landscape work (which forms an important aspect of the Academy's collection); several conspicuous water lilies suggest the late work of Monet; a lone yellow daisy amidst other foliage mimics Warhol's floral wallpaper; the overall pictorial structure of Marti's wallpaper is highly reminiscent of Roman Second Style wall painting; and there is something about the Elmer Fuddish figurine in a hot bubbly hell that suggests Hieronymus Bosch.

The references also suggest that the more we learn about our increasingly complex world, the less art seems able to meditate it: gone is the ability of a painted image to channel distant and exotic realities—those remote locations, once removed by impossibly difficult modes of travel and unbearable commitments of time, are now readily accessible or better simulated by cinema, photography, or approaching virtual realities. In Marti's critique the failure of high art is doctored by gimmickry; black lights and Day-Glo pigments attempt to offset and compensate for art's inability to capture the majesty and intensity of actual experience. The materials suggest the pathetic limitations of our own consciousness and our pitiful grapplings with the really large questions of good and evil, right and wrong, blame and consequence.

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PHILADELPHIA

VIRGIL MARTI's untitled site-specific installation at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (*June 15—September 2*) blends the materials of late '60s headshop art, the cartoony illusionism of black velvet painting, the appropriative tendencies of 19th-century eclecticism, sci-fi sculpturality, and a dash of dime-store doodads to produce a witty critique on the evolving nature of art and the increasingly precipitous schism between its former roles and its current possibilities.

Marti covered the gallery walls with hand printed Day-Glo wallpaper created specifically for the project. The paper simulates a heavily decorated, quadripartite paneled wall complete with celestial cornice, a landscape mural, a frieze of suspicious mushrooms, and flaming dado. Illuminated primarily by blacklight tubes, the installed paper offers a glowing panorama depicting an exotic paradise of mountains, rivers, waterfalls, palm trees, and tropical foliage under a churning orange, pink, blue, and purple sky. The border of stars above and



Virgil Marti, *site-specific installation at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 2001, dimensions variable (photo by Gregory Benson, courtesy of Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts).*

flames below nicely brackets this Eden with a touch of heavenly serenity and hellish torment.

A three dimensional element that somewhat resembles a section of ancient tree-trunk occupies the center of the gallery. The top of the piece extends the netherworld theme by presenting a quasi-topological surface puddled with spills of reddish-orange material that increase in height near three flickering, electric "candle flames." Landscaped with artificial cacti, the oozy surface is further interrupted by partial spheres of various size, like bubbles erupting through viscous liquid (think here of boiling pea soup). A mostly submerged head of