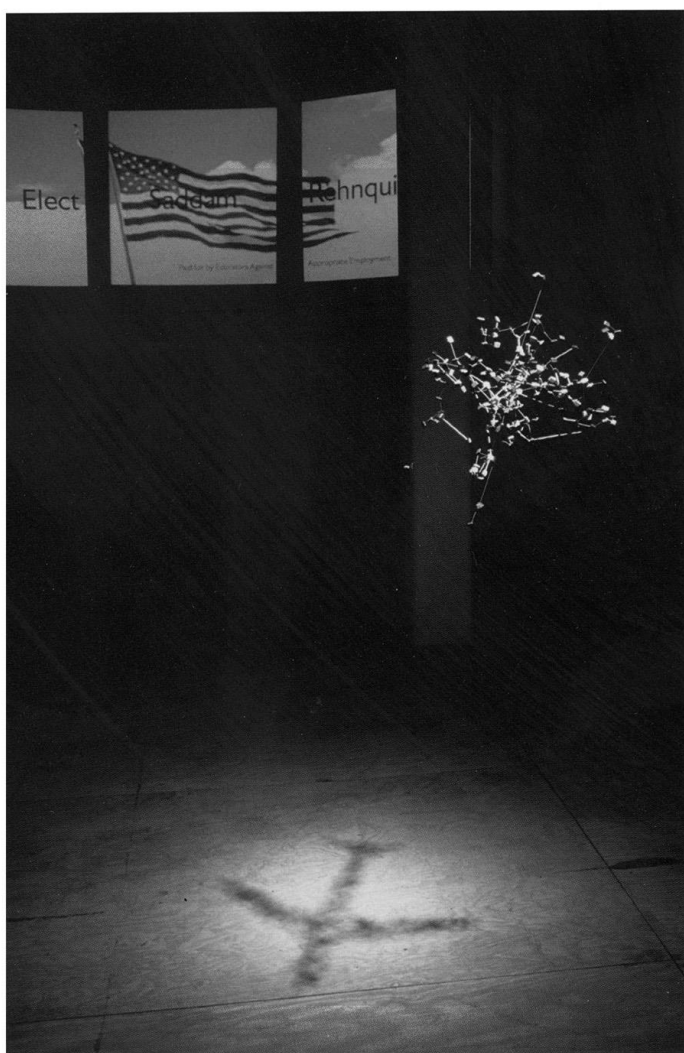


David Opdyke: Small World



Diane Dwyer: Such works as November 2000: Taste Test and November 2001: United We Fret, suggest that our freedom is purely symbolic. The maps that David Opdyke makes reveal that our choices within the presidential election are similar to our choices of Pepsi or Coke.

Phillip Buntin: I don't know how much this is a part of Opdyke's content, but in the exhibit I feel the inertia that is embedded within our system. It seems our choices both as individuals and as Americans within this system have to be made easy. So, politicians become as marketable and homogenous as any other product sold.

Carey McDougall: The work got me thinking about how we love the idea that we are a nation built on the notion of freedom and yet we go about making these choices between homogenous products. We get to play the game of freedom but there is no risk involved and in turn we don't have to take any responsibility for making a decision.

D.D.: It made me feel good to see an effective work of art that directly responded to September 11. I didn't know how it could be confronted. He is not accusatory or pointing a finger. We know the coded language that he is using so well that it is a little frightening. The more you are inclined to engage in his game room the more you realize how easily you understand and know the game from having played it. When I first saw Political Shuffle, I dismissed it. That very recognizable political imagery didn't interest me. I was assuming it was one-liners but the more I saw the different names in their randomness, it became more engaging in its lack of information. The very recognition of the imagery immediately implicated me in the American system which is the success that the work depends on.

C.M.: At first I was seeing names of people I would have never voted for and then I began to see the people I voted for and I realized that I too engage in this false choice-making game.

P.B.: Implicit in the shouting of these billboard images and texts is the oppositional tone. A fervency drowns the other out. In having a discourse you have to have some sort of understanding of the complexity of the discourse. There has to be an exchange. Shouting alludes to that there isn't an actual discourse as much as there are polarities that are presented to one another. Our positions don't amount to any actual content of difference, just an opposition.

Todd Jokl: The shouting match or the different image makes us think that there is a difference.

C.M.: That was why I got so excited by the use of the flip books and slot machine devices, his engagement of sculptural games. He physically shows us the mechanisms of our choices. There is no discourse.

T.J.: The series of flip books, You're Either With Us or Against Us continually reads its title. The thick flip books appear as if they would have many more choices and therefore ideas and yet no matter how these newspaper headlines are configured, we are left with two choices. There is no choice for discussion. Yet, we are mesmerized with the structure of the spinning flipbooks, the illusion of choice.

MAGNANMETZ GALLERY

P.B.: The exhibit reveals how we are good Americans. In democracy if you are going to have any sort of movement or control of people's minds and the discourses you have to learn to manufacture consent. It really seems to be working and the show exhibits that we are producing Americans that consent, that we are those Americans. He shows the mechanics, the map, the statistics, and the results of our consent.

C.M.: There is no discourse. We have more fun playing a slot machine. We want to play our game of monopoly, our stock market, and believe that there are no outside effects. That I am on my own little square of green turf and my actions only shadow over my yard or environment.

D.D.: Opdyke's work, though, appears to have several layers of meaning that open according to your own positioning. There's also the toy-like quality to the work, as though each piece is a game or part of a game. When we first picked this show to talk about, I was suspect of my inclination to be taken in by its little motorized fun "wow"ness that begins immediately when you enter the gallery. You are greeted by 14 miniature music boxes tinkling "Its A Small World." It is very seductive, but it holds up beyond being entertaining.

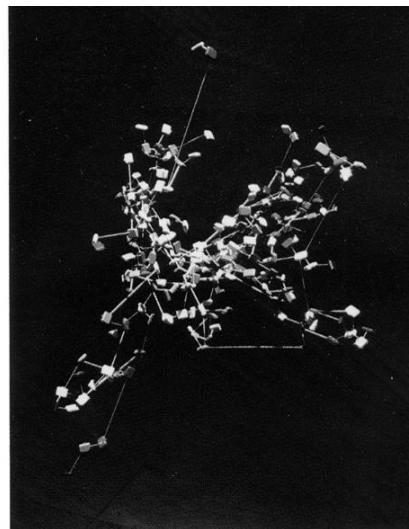
T.J.: What was interesting for me about the music boxes was that they were performing in rounds, so they weren't playing the same notes at the same time. It is another illusion of difference and another reference to the type of risk or play we like to engage in. I assumed it was playing off the holiday season but you forget the holiday season in the main room. The music stays with you, echoing through the gallery which gets more and more cavernous and ominous. The gallery with all its played out games, motors, and clean design feels empty.

D.D.: I had a similar experience with *Closer to Home* and *Bargain Squadron*. These works are thoughtfully put together. The motors purr, they are synchronized and yet they don't really accomplish much. The American engines keep turning over and over on themselves, yet they never go anywhere. They just keep spinning.

P.B.: I also at first felt skeptical about the level of depth in the work. Although the exhibition is an installation, some of the individual pieces seem to be only one-liners. I remember laughing when I first walked into the gallery. There was a joy in those motors endlessly tinkling out this music. As we progressed through the exhibit and passed by this piece again, the nature of my response had changed from whimsical to ominous. Another strength of this work is that coming to it as an artist, I find them appealing as aesthetic objects yet their very content questions their aesthetic.

D.D.: I find this to be the most intriguing thing about it.

P.B.: What I am asking from aesthetics is that I have an experiential engagement with it, that it be embodied and not just the reading of an encoded text. A great example is *Aviation Agglomeration* from a distance only a molecular structure is visible. As I moved closer a shadow of an airplane becomes apparent. Finally I was confronted with the fact that the structure is made of little plastic suitcases bare-



ly held together with wire. The progression from a distanced perception to a closer viewing is effective. Yet at other times there isn't enough aesthetic in what he is doing. Time and time again I would have an embodied response and only to then have the polemic interrupt it.

T.J.: But isn't it important that these pieces remind us we are playing some very serious games?

C.M.: Our little harmless toys, our kites, then flags, then fighter planes cast great shadows on each and every one of our contained and homogenized yards. Our dark sides are also within our yards, not just out in other countries. There is a shadow to our games, our play.

D.D.: The kites aren't just a reference to planes they refer to our play. What do we do? We play a lot.

C.M.: Even though most of these works were made prior to September 11, the exhibition is timely in relation to September 11 and the consumption level of the holiday season. I am wondering how this show would hold up in another time, previous to this year or in the future.

P.B.: Yes, especially with Guiliani's and Bush's edict to consume if you want to help New York and America respectively.

C.M.: As an artist it is hard for me to go into the studio and make work that doesn't directly address our country's actions. It is a privilege to look the other way. Other content seems less crucial or even futile. It was a relief to walk into a gallery that was exhibiting work that encouraged me to think about these issues.

T.J.: For me the timeliness adds to the impact, the exhibit strikes a nerve. It asks us to do what the media asks us not to do. This exhibit engages us in choicelessness, lack of questioning, and naming their implications.

David Opdyke: *Small World* was on display at Roebbling Hall in December, 2001 □