

Miriam Dym

at POST WILSHIRE, 9 September–9 October

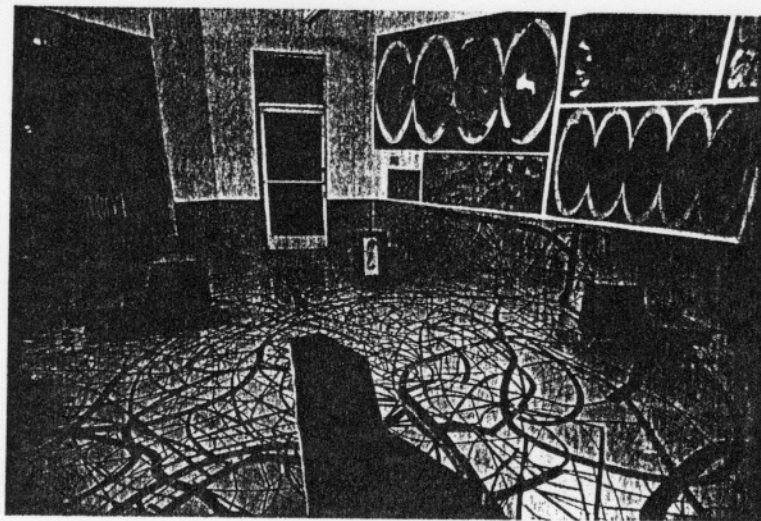
The old saying that “the map is not the territory” is Miriam Dym’s starting point in “Don’t forget to ask for directions,” an installation that combines floor- and wall-mounted images, moving objects, and sheer curtains. With a savvy use of the language of mapping and marketing, the artist exploits the look of maps to explode their function as navigational and information tools. A consummate designer, she has attended to every contingency: including a map for directions, toy trucks for transport, representations of continents to get the bigger picture, and circus ray guns just in case. But while sporting the look of utility, each of these objects operates in a manner that is not determined by functional concerns. Maps become a mere *motif* for Dym, and assured incoherence is the place to which she takes us.

The gallery is divided into two sections: a rumpus room and a display area. In the rumpus room, Plexiglas-covered inkjet prints form tiles which cover the floor and lower perimeter of the walls. Lines of red and blue twist and twirl over a field of solid yellow. Scooter-sized toy trucks, covered with screen-printed fabric also designed by the artist, wait in each corner for riders to travel the red and blue curling paths below. One can uneasily navigate the tiles seated backwards on a truck, but each of the little vehicle’s three wheels seems to have a mind of its own, like a dreaded shopping cart that veers off in its own direction. The overall effect of trying to follow a line recalls the elementary school game of “crab soccer;” movement is inevitable but intention is not its rudder.

Hung salon-style from the edges of the floor to the ceiling are Dym’s *Continents* (all works, 1999), a series of inkjet prints reminiscent of maps of the world. Each flattened set of ellipses contains a different arrangement of unfamiliar shapes. Their pinks, acid greens, and maroons jar against the deep turquoise, puce, and chalky yellow of the ellipses. This ordered cacophony of visual information evokes a schoolroom seen through the eyes of a hyperactive child—a padded cell overflowing with information. It feels as if you are being squeezed out of the room by visual overload.

Happily departing through sheer blue curtains, one’s eyes are immediately soothed by walls of gray. Mounted like miniature fans, Dym’s *Circus Ray Guns* recall pinwheels and sit on two sets of narrow shelves, each group framed by a gray map. These kooky objects evoke the orderly presen-

tation of museum displays and are accompanied by wall-labels providing “background” information. Turning back to the rumpus room, you can just make out that the sheer curtains have been printed with the silhouettes of the ray guns. The pattern creates a reflexive context in the same way that Snoopy-patterned wallpaper echoes



the stuffed toy sitting on a kid’s bed.

If the map is not the territory in “Don’t forget to ask for directions,” neither is the territory the map. References to mapping become diluted—and insistently decorative—when enlarged to the scale of a gallery-sized installation, which is further reinforced by the artist’s design of every object in the room. Dym’s imaginary maps do not have the conceptual depth of ordinary maps, which transform experience into language and symbols. The fundamental idea of her color-coordinated installation—that technology gets us no closer to knowledge, and that marketing gets us no closer to our needs—is a disappointing intellectual return for so thoroughly conceived a work.

Available for view upon request, *Compendium or An Abbreviated Catalog* is more delightful in its relationship to maps. A handmade book of electrostatic prints, it contains Dym’s functional plans: computer drawings made to map out installations. Each tiny inkjet print is accompanied by directions about how it is to be used, how much it should be enlarged, and to what degree its proportions may change in production. In their minute details—including hair-width lines, tiny numbers that pepper a surface, and inscribed circles indicating magnified areas—these works pull out all the stops, hurtling us into a fantastic land where expectation, separation, longing, and projection take over.

Miriam Dym
“Don’t forget to ask
for directions,” 1999
Installation view

Ingrid Calame is an artist and writer who lives in Los Angeles.