Atlanta

Donald Locke

Solomon Projects

In "From the Altars of El Dorado," Atlanta artist Donald Locke explored the folklore of his birth country, Guyana, with more than 30 sculptures that form a personal iconography of the mythical El Dorado. This legendary region was thought to contain enormous riches of gold and gems, and 16th-century European explorers scoured northern South America in futile—and often deadly—attempts to find it. While El Dorado was purely a dream, Guyana became the site of extensive goldfields, and the fever for treasure continues unabated. Locke's bushmen, bulls, "pork knockers," royalty and supernatural beings, most of which are less than two feet tall, embody the mystery of El Dorado and capture the essence of imagined characters who might have played a part in perpetuating its legend. The show marked a departure from much of Locke's previous sculpture, reflecting his growing interest in the intuitive methods of vernacular artists.

Locke has worked with various media throughout his career, including cast bronze and clay; for this group of sculptures, he largely used organic materials, such as wax, wood, feathers, horsehair, and animal skins. When he incorporates manmade materials such as steel and other metals, it seems to signal a clash or overlap between the unspoiled, natural world of Guyana and the artificiality of the prospectors' search for gold and gems. The conspicuous collision of the organic and the synthetic underscores Locke's apparent focus on materiality.

At the gallery's entrance, *Dunnamite Dan, Bush Man*, a nearly seven-foot-tall sculpture fashioned of wood branches and wax, greeted visitors. The branches, only slightly altered from their original state as part of a tree or bush, are bound together with gauze to form a body and legs. The bushman's head, perched atop the central branch, is covered in deep brown wax, and the face, like many in the show, has rough features and hollow eyes, with twigs sprouting like hair from the top of the head. Locke's raw treatment of this figure set the tone for the rest of the show, which celebrated the beauty of unrefined forms.

Some of the most compelling pieces depict the bushman Locke calls Joe Potaro. "Potaro" refers to a region in northeastern Guyana, part of a historic diamond- and

Donald Locke, *Hindu Spirit*, 2001. Brass, wax, and artificial hair, 12 x 5 x 6 in.

COURTESY SOLOMON PROJECTS, ATLANTA

Above: Donald Locke, *Captain Bull Senior*, 2001. Copper wire, wax, and wood, 8 x 7 x 6 in. Below: Tony Feher, *Century Plant*, 2002. Plastic beverage crates, work shown in "Aspects of Color."

gold-mining district. *Joe Potaro, Saga Boy* strikingly depicts Potaro's head and torso in wood and wax, faceless and limbless, with a rack of steel bars forming the spine and a blond horsehair ponytail jutting from the head. A swatch of animal fur substitutes for the face, which suggests a sense of universality in the bushman's plight. The metal spine seems to be a commentary on the increasing influence of the desire for metals, precious and otherwise, on the lives of the bushmen in Guyana.

The prospectors' role in the El Dorado tale is represented in *Rugged Mac, Pork Knocker*. Pork knockers were fortune seekers in Guyana whose nickname refers to the salt pork that was a staple of their diet. The figure, composed of wax, wood, and fabric, portrays a man with thin stick legs, no arms, a gaunt face, and a great bundle of branches strapped to his back. The branches typify the heavy burdens that prospectors bore in the quest for riches. Prospectors endured intense physical hardships during their exploration of interior Guyana and often died in their efforts.

Supernatural beings also were thought to play a role in the search for gold and gems, since it was believed that spirits guarded the goldfields. *Bush Spirit*, a rugged head on a wax foundation with a metal hoop earring dangling from one ear, signifies the power of belief in these unknown forces.

While "From the Altars of El Dorado" was an exceptional collection of Locke's new work, the presentation, with most of the pieces crowded together on one large table, limited the viewer's ability to see and consider each piece individually. Had the work been separated on various tables or pedestals, each sculpture would have been given the necessary space to display Locke's immense talent. But regardless of their positioning, Locke's new sculptures exude a powerful presence and provide a potent commentary on the power of myth.

—Amre Klimchak

San Francisco

"Aspects of Color"

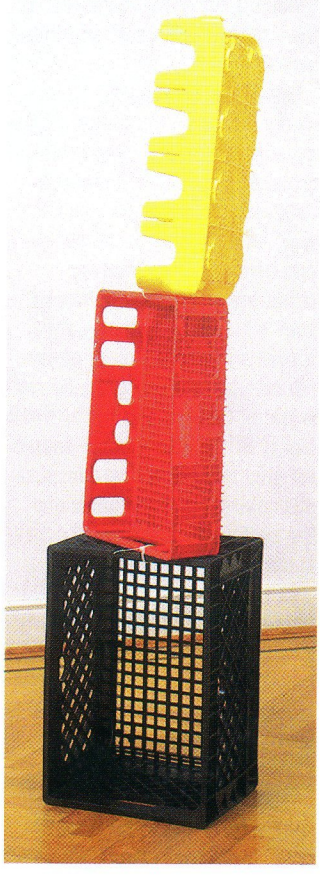
Anthony Meier Fine Art

"Aspects of Color" refutes the notion that Minimalists consider color to be an "aside." Here, classic works by Carl Andre, Donald Judd, and Agnes Martin are enlivened by Tony Feher's contemporary explorations into material, form, and, well, color.

Untitled (8 March 1965) is an unusual and early variant of Judd's "boxes." Four horizontal sides of red fluorescent Plexiglas are embraced by velvety vertical panels of cold rolled steel. Visible interior cables connect the opposing steel plates, holding the entire piece together in a structural tension that is reinforced visually by contrasts in hue, texture, temperature, and opacity. On the wall above is a "progression" of clear anodized aluminum, *Untitled* (1976), whose attenuated rounded ramparts impart an abacus of positive and negative space. The metallic sheen and absence of overt color become a negative to the positive possibility of palette and to the multiple shadows cast on the wall below. *Untitled (30 July 1969)* is a relatively wilder work that acts out Judd's early experimentation with proportions of form and color. Blocks of progressive length in Judd's signature red are affixed to the wall, buttressing an open-ended four-by-four in Harley Davidson purple. The combination of mathematical precision and vibrant, hand-applied paint energizes the formula, souping up the progression from staid study to Minimalist hot rod. Down below is Andre's floor piece *Copper-Zinc Plain* (1969), whose alternating squares express an interest in hue and value, but only insofar as materials per se can provide them. Laid to checkerboard effect, it is a conceptual game of visual stalemate.

Endless variations on a theme continue in the work of Agnes Martin, whose unswerving vision links past and present practice. Her hushed meditative paintings possess Minimalist restraint without imposing edge. Martin's subtle colors and hand-drawn lines exude lyricism and invite community. A large pale pink and faded blue canvas, *Untitled #14* (1981), bears numerical notations that plan and lend pattern to the piece, allowing the viewer into her process. The surface of *Untitled #8* (1999) is so delicate and mild that it almost disappears on approach, evanescence that mirrors its conceptual premise.

Like Judd, Feher is interested in clean pristine materials. And like Andre he charges them by bringing color to the work. But like Martin's paintings, his work is marked by the presence rather than the absence of humanity. He accomplishes this not through revelation of process, but in his use of found objects, which positions him at the very interesting intersection of assemblage and Minimalism. Feher collects familiar things and combines them so as to confound their function into pure form. In *Century Plant* (2002), plastic beverage crates are stacked on end so that they relate more to Judd's progression pieces than to their intended utility. But because they remain recognizable, this recontextualization results in a well-conceived whimsy that is surprisingly apolitical. In *Untitled* (2002), a flask-size liquor bottle filled with blue marbles and isopropyl alcohol is upended into a block of concrete. A study in contrasts—



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