



Art Meets Ecology at MAM

Mark Dion: South Florida Wildlife Rescue Unit
October 27, 2006 – January 14, 2007

Interweaving the diverse disciplines of art, science, ecology, history, and archeology, Mark Dion's installation in Miami Art Museum's New Work Gallery questions human attempts to rationalize and control the Everglades of South Florida. Dion will introduce the exhibition with an artist talk at 6:30pm during the exhibition's members' preview on Thursday, October 26, from 5 to 8:30 pm.

"Mark Dion's project at MAM focuses on the historical evolution of attitudes toward South Florida's environment, from the 1830s to the present day," MAM Assistant Curator René Morales said. "Historically, perceptions of the Everglades have oscillated between romantic veneration and disdain, between fervent calls to subdue and transform 'the swamp' to impassioned pleas for conservation and restoration. While the juxtapositions presented by the installation reflect these varied and contradictory perceptions, they also afford a sense of how this history is replete with cyclical recurrences."

Dion's installation features the vehicle and equipment of the South Florida Wildlife Rescue Unit, an imaginary agency that rushes into vulnerable ecosystems to save threatened plants and animals. The vehicle is outfitted with a variety of objects, from scientific instruments to the kind of gear one would want to have on hand while trekking through Florida's difficult terrain. Laid out in self-apparent order like a natural history display, these objects serve as a practical how-to guide for spectators who may be inspired to carry out the team's activities for themselves. With a measure of dry irony, the Rescue Unit represents the dream of decisive action on the part of policymakers – while saluting grassroots-level activism.

Accompanying the Rescue Unit is a series of digital reproductions of vintage photographs taken by John Kunkel Small (1869-1938), a curator of the New York Botanical Garden who identified numerous plant species in the Everglades and authored a scathing book entitled *From Eden to Sahara: Florida's Tragedy*.

The project also features *Herbarium Perrine (Marine Algae)* – a book of pressed specimens – supposedly assembled by 19th-century botanist and early Florida settler Henry Perrine. Like Dion's previous subjects Alfred Russell Wallace and Georges Cuvier, Perrine formed part of a legion of semi-amateur naturalists who,

throughout the century of Darwin, risked life and limb venturing into remote regions in order to unlock the puzzle of evolution. In 1840, Perrine was killed in a Seminole raid at his home on Indian Key, and his life's work was destroyed in a fire. Yellowed and charred as if damaged by fire, the herbarium's pages epitomize the obsessive drive with which such early eco-adventurers developed and standardized methods for the taxonomic classification, rationalization, and representation of the natural world.

The exhibition is organized by Miami Art Museum and curated by Assistant Curator René Morales as part of *New Work*, a series of projects by leading contemporary artists. It is supported in part by the Funding Arts Network, Inc.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Mark Dion was born in New Bedford, Massachusetts in 1961 and currently lives in Beach Lake, Pennsylvania. For over 15 years, Mark Dion has created exhibitions at venues around the world stemming from archaeological digs and botanical research, which he often conducts at the exhibition sites. Dion's projects probe the systems of knowledge that underlie museum displays and scientific research, examining how collections and information are acquired, constructed, classified and presented. His work has prompted him to undertake several journeys deep into the rainforests of South America and other remote regions throughout the world. He has earned an honorary Ph.D. from the University of Hartford and is a recipient of the Larry Aldrich Foundation Award. Dion studied at the School of Visual Arts and the Whitney Museum of American Art Independent Study Program in New York, and the University of Hartford, Connecticut. His work has been the focus of several solo exhibitions at venues including the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, CT (2005); The Museum of Modern Art, New York (2004); the Fabric Workshop and Museum (2003); University of Tokyo Museum, Tokyo (2002) and Wiesman Art Museum, Minneapolis, MN (2001).

ABOUT THE CURATOR

René Morales was named Assistant Curator at the Miami Art Museum in 2006. He played a significant role in the adaptation of the retrospective *Ana Mendieta: Earth Body* for its presentation at MAM and co-curated the MAM exhibitions *Mapping Space* and *Miami in Transition*. He is currently curating exhibitions in MAM's Video Gallery. Prior to joining MAM, Morales served as a curatorial intern at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City and as a Curatorial Assistant at the Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design. Morales, who immigrated to Miami from Cuba in 1980, graduated with a double major in Art History and Psychobiology from Swarthmore College in 1997 and received a Master's degree in Art History from Brown University in 2000.

Related Publications and Programs

Gallery Notes

A free, illustrated brochure with an essay by curator René Morales provides background information and an in-depth examination of the exhibition. Available in the galleries.

Opening Reception

Thursday, October 26, 2006

6 to 8pm

Music, hors d'oeuvres, donation bar

MAM Members only.

Illustrated talk by Mark Dion

6:30 to 7:15pm

Sundays are Free at MAM

12 – 5pm

Guided tours of the exhibition every Sunday at 2pm

Second Saturdays are Free for Families

Second Saturday of every month, 1 – 4pm

Drop in to enjoy fun, interactive programs. Families of all ages explore MAM together, find inspiration to create works of art, and participate in hands-on activities led by Gallery Teachers.

Media Contact:

Mitchell Snow

305-375-1705

snowmit@miamidade.gov

Accredited by the American Association of Museums, Miami Art Museum is sponsored in part by the State of Florida, Department of State, Division of Cultural Affairs and the Florida Arts Council, and the National Endowment for the Arts; with the support of the Miami-Dade County Department of Cultural Affairs, the Cultural Affairs Council, the Mayor and the Board of County Commissioners. The Miami Art Museum is an accessible facility. For sign language interpretation or assistive listening devices please call MAM's Education Department 305-375-4073 at least five days in advance. Materials in accessible format also may be requested.

101 West Flagler St.

Miami, FL 33130

305-375-3000

miamiartmuseum.org

Garage Parking
\$5 at 50 NW 2nd Ave
between Flagler St and NW 1st St