

Art in America

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John F. Simon Jr. at Sandra Gering

Linoleum and Formica are materials more often associated with kitchens than with digital art projects, but they are the primary mediums used by computer-whiz John F. Simon Jr. in his witty second solo show at Sandra Gering. Best known for his Net-based art works and Mondrian-inspired LCD panels, Simon has recently turned his attention to creating objects with the help of a CO₂ laser cutter. His new works are liberated from electronic support systems and are surprisingly domestic in scale and attitude. Only one piece in this show, *Swarms* (2002), utilized LCD panels.

For "New Instructions," every surface of the gallery space was covered with Simon's new products—from the window treatment to the floor covering. Simon installed 12 translucent Plexiglas panels in the windows of the gallery. Each measuring 11½ by 30 inches and composed of two contrasting colors, the panels bore the unmistakable artificiality and garish hues of commercially produced plastic. To offset this look of mass production, Simon laser cut delicate patterns of stars and waves on each sheet.

On the other side of the room, four wall pieces were made of multicolored Formica mounted on board. The triangular bits of Formica in primary colors were sometimes arranged in random masses, at other times in quiltlike

grids on gray and white backgrounds. *Double Flower* (2002) is a floor piece composed of 966 interlocking linoleum tiles in red, blue and yellow. Here, Simon combines two value systems within a single work: the time-consuming labor of laying tile and the seemingly effortless process of computer output.

Presented on two 50-inch LCD screens, even *Swarms*, a mesmerizing technological work, seemed imbued with references to domesticity. A computer-generated animation was shown on panels that stood vertically, resembling a folding Japanese screen. The imagery in the animation recalled an American quilt, at least at first. Then the triangles that made up each "patch" burst into chaotic birdlike flocks, hovering and rushing across the surface.

Screens, window shades, floor tiles—this wedding of technology and handicraft reminded this viewer of the many ways that the computer has supplanted traditional domestic activities. To test this theory, just try out Simon's new Web project, *Unfolding Object*, commissioned by the Guggenheim Museum for its permanent collection [<http://unfoldingobject.guggenheim.org>]. Here, Simon allows viewers to endlessly transmute a simple box with the click of a mouse. After an hour or two playing with this hypnotic program, see if you remember to change a lightbulb.

—Barbara Pollack



John F. Simon Jr.: View of "New Instructions," 2002, showing laser-cut Plexiglas panels, 11½ by 30 inches each; at Sandra Gering.