



Virgil Marti: *Landscape Wallpaper with Star Border & Shrooms & Flame Dado*, 2001, screenprinted fluorescent and rayon flock on paper, dimensions variable; at Elizabeth Dee.

Virgil Marti at Elizabeth Dee

When, in the not-too-distant future, glossy shelter magazines feature moon-base decor, there's a good chance the photo spreads will resemble mixed-medium artist Virgil Marti's exhibition of seven high-concept artworks—that is, of course, if the tastes of tomorrow's decorators are as steeped as Marti's in cheesy science fiction, 19th-century French literature and the history of interior design. In this rather arch show, clunky *Star Trek* sets combined with Rodeo Drive chic to generate a low-grade commercial buzz laden with an overabundance of historical and cultural allusions.

The centerpiece of the exhibition (all works 2004) was a quintet of wall-mounted sculptures, or "sconces," fashioned out of white plastic, foam, and faceted, mirrored Plexiglas cut to resemble oversized tortoise shells. Instead of tapers, however, these fixtures—bearing colorful titles like *Electric Blue Apogee* and *Kurious Oranji*—held metallized and rhinestone-encrusted cacti, cast-resin flowers and illuminated chrome-capped bulbs. The references here ranged from Tiffany lamps to the esthetic cloister of J.-K. Huysmans's 1896 *A Rebours*, a classic novel of decadence. Adding to the sense of airlessness was the wall of Escher-like wallpaper, based on a photograph of the lunar surface.

Reprising, in a way, his triumphant installation *Grow Room 3* from the 2004 Whitney Biennial,

Marti covered a second room with black-light-illuminated flocked wallpaper depicting a fanciful environment of mountains, streams and waterfalls. Although the artist references Hudson River School paintings and the ornamental designs of 19th-century architect Frank Furness, the atmosphere seemed more reminiscent of the digitally enhanced landscapes of *Lord of the Rings*. And while the star pattern across the upper border and flames decorating the dado were arresting, they went little beyond the zingy "coolness" of 1960s head-shop culture.

Unlike *Grow Room 3*, which contained macramé duplications of webs spun by drugged spiders and chandeliers fashioned from resin antlers, Marti's new work seems focused less on decadence than on the excesses of haute consumerism. *Ode on a Paul Smith Bag*, for example, was a large rubber cube—one corner excavated away—adorned with the clothing designer's trademark stripes and sporting two pieces of coral and an inset candle for good measure. Like the sconces, the result was a kind of satirical fashion object that tweaked the current obsession with design and celebrity designers. True decadence, however, possesses a disquieting sense of life growing and mutating into strange and unrecognizable forms. The objects in Marti's latest show have the strangeness one might discover someday in an intergalactic department store: commodities that are weird, inert and ready for purchase. —Steven Vincent