

Art in America

APRIL 2008

John Simon Jr. at Gering & López

No one makes groovier digital imagery than John Simon Jr., and unlike most of his nearest peers (notably the late Jeremy Blake), Simon, a true computer whiz, writes his own programs.

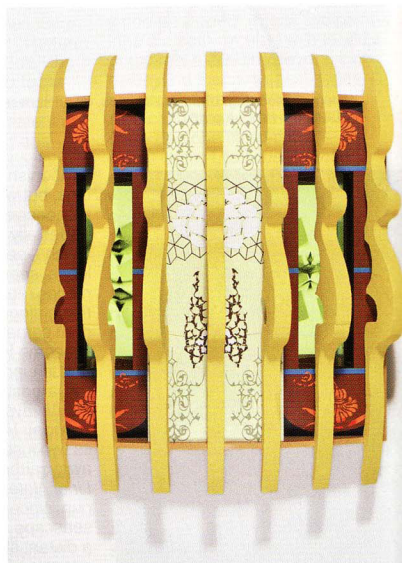
The patterns pulse, spiral, weave and fade in infinitely varied ways; it is his trademark that no sequence repeats, though each has formal constraints.

In early work, these patterns were the whole story, and part of the viewer's job was figuring out something about how given variables (say, the components of a painting by Mondrian) were manipulated to produce each program. With these new pieces, all 2007, Simon has shifted gears, housing each LCD screen or pair of screens in an elaborate piece of wall-hung cabinetry (they average 4 or 5 feet on a side). Like those for the earliest television sets, these cabinets are substantial pieces of furniture, and they are fabricated—mainly from laser-cut Formica but also mirrored acrylic, lacquered wood, paper and miscellaneous hardware—in a variety of period modes: Bauhaus basic, Danish modern, swinging '60s Alhambra, hyperkinetic punk. *Chip*, a stylized and massively enlarged 3-D computer chip, looks like a display from the 1964 World's Fair. Its screen is a bright-blue hemisphere with a spiky iris spinning madly at its center, surrounded by an eye-shaped field of white. *Flip* is all tastefully colored louvers, its screen an ever-shifting sequence of vertical stripes.

Proto-Abstract-Expressionist biomorphism seems to be a force behind *Spiral*, where a schematic leaf and chrysalis are inscribed within a Formica graphic of a spiral; an emblematic insect perches near the top. The digital animation here is, naturally, a spiraling kaleidoscope of circles and squares. *Crown* is one of two works that each have two narrow vertical screens, and in this case a suggestion that they stand for eyes is supported by distinctively elaborate housing. It includes a sliced and fanned out cartoon human profile made of bright yellow-painted wood; this wooden grill crowns a Formica

structure whose central panel divides the two video screens. Getting the pair of spinning patterns on these two screens in focus simultaneously puts you in touch with the unsung neural triumph that is binocular vision.

In fact Simon, a Louisiana-born New Yorker in his mid-40s, now seems to be staking his career on integrating disparate fields. On the one hand, he is a transcendently inclined esthete with an interest in Rumi's poetry reflected in the show's title, "Winds Across the Inner Sea," which is the first



John Simon Jr.: *Crown*, 2007, software, LCD screen and mixed mediums, 48 by 48 by 14 inches; at Gering & López.

line of a lyrical verse by Simon himself that was lettered on the gallery's wall. On the other hand, he installed three works—two from 2004, one new—in the windows at Macy's concurrently with the gallery show, and they looked just great with purple satin pumps and a pony-skin handbag. It is perfectly possible to put the new works in the tradition of R. M. Fischer's lamps (shown in a hot clothing store in the '80s), Haim Steinbach's tchotchkes and Peter Halley's wallpaper. But Simon's heart seems to be innocent of such archly consumer-critical schemes. Instead, he seems intent on all manner of visual hedonism, geeks and ideologues be damned.

—Nancy Princenthal