

MARK DAGLEY

EARL MCGRATH GALLERY

Mark Dagley has long explored the language of painting by playing with both surfaces and supports. He has made torqued monochromes, eccentric shaped canvases, paintings with blocks cut out of them, and wall sculptures of exposed stretcher bars, all with a characteristically wry sensibility. His most recent series of paintings represents something of a departure. Though he continues to raise questions about painting, he now does so without breaking it down into its constituent parts.

Combining the flat colors and taped-canvas edges of the Washington Color School (Gene Davis, Kenneth Noland, and Morris Louis, among others) with designs reminiscent of '60s and '70s supergraphics, the new paintings are so familiar they almost seem like old news. Dagley makes no attempt to bowl the viewer over with either scale or craftsmanship; never larger than life-size, the canvases are covered in only a few coats of paint, the taped edges often left ragged. Yet this work has undeniable wit and power. In *Vanishing Point*, 1994, alternating stripes of red, yellow, and blue converge at the painting's lower left-hand corner to suggest a skewed, boxy version of Raymond Loewy's Shell Oil logo. The arbitrariness of the work's vanishing point and its bizarre diagonal emphasis go against the conventions of both "good design" and the tenets of Color Field painting as if to suggest that the ideals that informed both practices are hopelessly stodgy. In *We Are Not Alone*, 1995, Dagley takes the affront even further by violating a cheerful pattern of ballooning curves with an incongruous black asterisk (made by pressing an inked edge of corrugated cardboard against the surface of the canvas).

Dagley removes supergraphics from the realm of advertising and Color Field painting from the realm of formalism, mobilizing them in the service of lived experience. In *Concentric Sequence*, 1996, what could have been a purist dot pattern becomes a reflection of self-imposed, ritualized labor: an enormous, tightly wound spiral of circles that gradually increase from a few millimeters in diameter in the canvas' center to an inch-and-a-half at its edge. The lightly penciled circles are filled in with acrylic paint in a repeated color sequence of red, blue, and yellow so that from the beginning of the spiral to its end chains of Mondrian-colored dots radiate in all directions. The overall effect of these zigzags



Mark Dagley, *We Are Not Alone*, 1995,
oil and acrylic on canvas, 82 x 64".

(which merge the contemplative pull of an Eastern mandala with the stroboscopic pulse of a deranged optical experiment) couldn't have been fully anticipated until the piece was finished, and the viewer has the sense of discovering something right along with the artist. This is one of the many ways in which Dagley reanimates visual forms long considered obsolete.

—Tom Moody