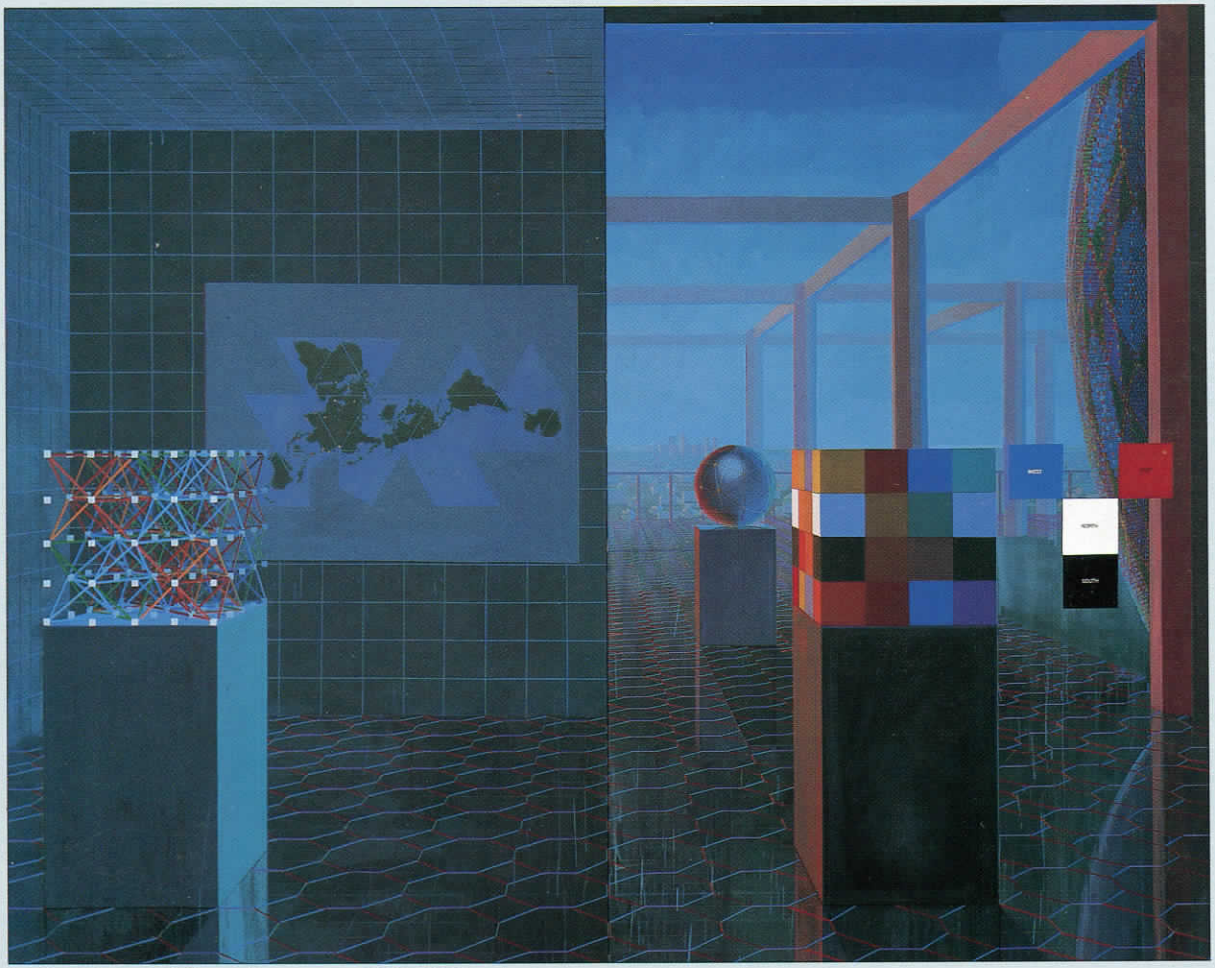


WORLD GAME, 1990, acrylic on canvas, 108" x 136"

CLARK RICHERT

NON/EUCLIDEAN WALKS

There is a fundamental human longing to bring order to nature's magnificently unkempt sway. Our species has applied itself tenaciously to this problem for ages, and has posed scores of different solutions, including gods and religions, sciences, arts, philosophies, and technologies.

Like the blind men of Hindustan, who, having earnestly groped the different parts of an elephant, could not agree on the beast's conformation, we find no explanation wholly satisfying. The inquiries of science seem to preclude faith, and art airily flouts logic. We are left with no reassuring certainties and no apparent convergence of meanings. Even mathematics and theoretical physics, currently leading the pack in the use of abstractions as keys to understanding, are not yet in possession of the Whole Truth.

But artists are more sanguine about our problem.

Clark Richert's large, highly-detailed paintings might be billboards along the highroad of our cosmic quest, each proclaiming a metaphysical destination. Like the scientist and the magician, Richert makes constructs of the imagination that — however fleetingly — seem to resolve the vexing and exquisite paradoxes of life.

Questions addressed by others through equations or prayer are posed by Clark Richert in the vocabulary of the pictorial tradition: the interior, the still-life, the landscape, the human form. To this tradition, he brings a devotion to mathematics as the proper metaphor for microcosm and macrocosm alike.

The twin-pairs of opposites posited by virtually every cosmology from the Upanishads to Steven Hawking, are set forth in his paintings by contrasts of flatness and perspective, the suggestion of "inside" and "outside" spaces, by the Lewis Carroll world of the reflection, by the systematic application of colors, by interlocking grids and matrices. Richert has made a personal symbol of the fractal number, endlessly reproducing its own form, the model and mirror of the cellular and molecular and submolecular existence.

The purely formal aspects of Richert's work — his love for a painterly surface that preserves random drips and spatters, his insistence on a "handmade" look to his intricate tesselations — lend depth both to the visual presentation of the paintings and to their meaning. To keep the sensuality of the work of hand, he forgoes the computer-generated image.

The playful aspect of his researches, well known to physicists and chess wizards like Marcel Duchamp, underlies *World Game*. Here, a huge sphere, Buckminster Fuller's "Geoscope," intrudes like a nosy planet upon a gallery-like setting graced with Fuller's "Dymaxion Map," and three of Richert's favored philosophical instruments, the sphere, the cube, and the skeletal octet truss, perched on stands like sculptures.

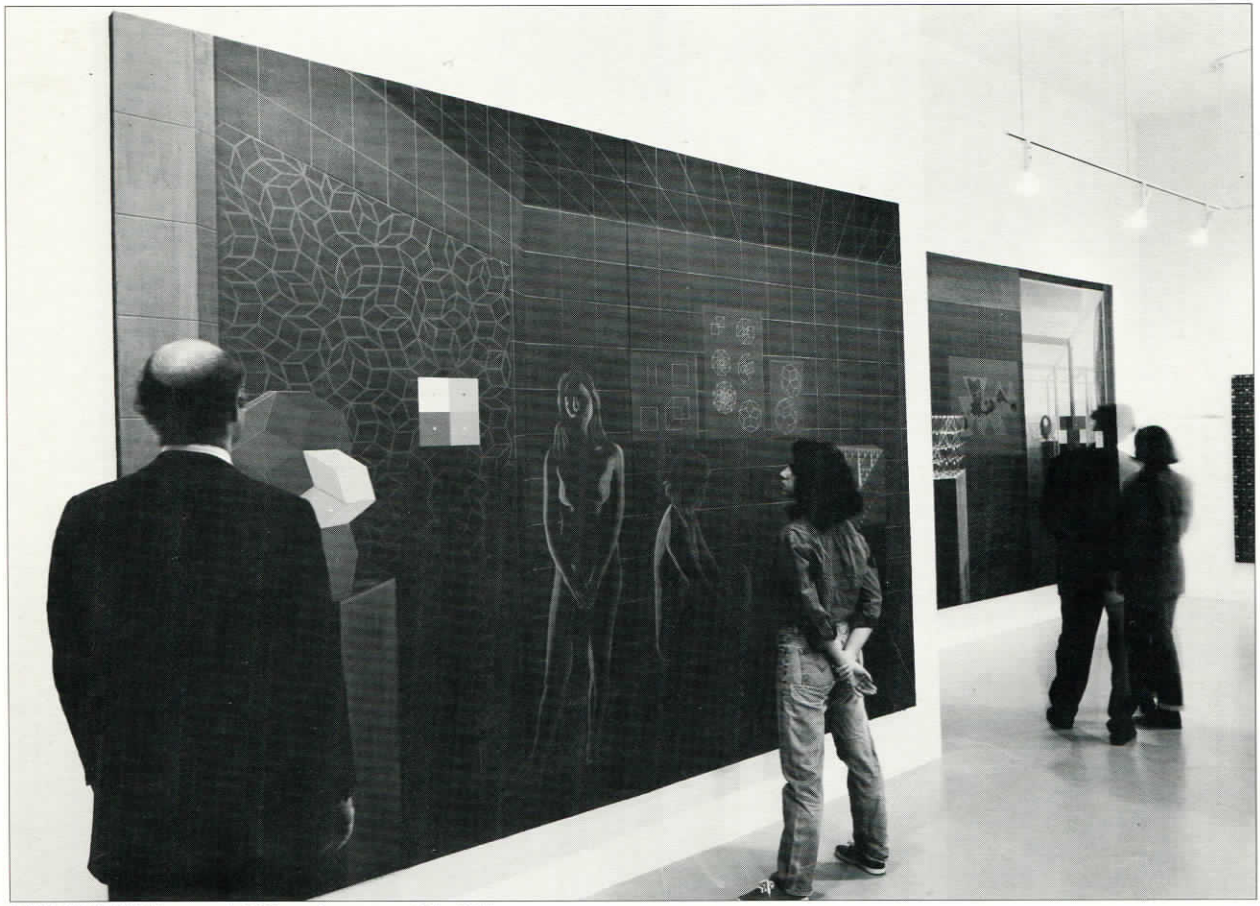
Within, all is order, even severity, a rigidly applied, if arbitrary elegance of color and form. This is the world of ideals, of the mind. This is the realm of abstractions. Outside is the tangible world, represented by a cityscape recognizable as Denver, cast in the imperfect geometries of "reality."

Painted with a featureless modeling reminiscent of the style of regionalist Grant Wood, this distant landscape is less vividly realized than the room. Atmospheric and geometric perspectives struggle to cancel each other's effects. Logic is the counterpoint to the senses, and the pale remoteness of Richert's naturalistic view underscores his preoccupation with the life of the mind. For all its artifice, the domain of the intellect has a splendor that the earthly paradise cannot match. *World Game* shows the border country between art and life.

When human players step into Richert's omnidirectional limelight, they, too, are abstractions, in spite of the emotional appeal of their nudity. In *Study of 6-Space*, Richert quotes Seurat, another systematic painter, in the women's poses. However, his nudes inhabit a place far stranger and grander than the studio: it is 6-dimensional space, and the objects on which they serenely meditate are representations of a cube, depicted according to the laws of 6-space's peculiar physics.

That the women are apparently untouched by the conventions of the space is a deeper mystery. The mortal confronts the immortal and is not found wanting, for the torque of her bones and the length of her digits are bounded by the Golden Mean.

Yet, while the artist's pursuits lead him beyond the commonplaces of time and space, the physical limitations of the human body tie the artist and his creatures firmly to the earth



STUDY IN 6-SPACE (foreground), 1990, acrylic on canvas, 96" x 136"

and its contingencies. The consolations of philosophy are just that; they do not change the inescapable, if arbitrary, effects of mortal time. As in Durer's *Melencolia I*, contemplation of the apparatus of reason affords us stasis, but not peace.

In Clark Richert's paintings, we are vouchsafed a glimpse just shy of the primal scene, right after the One divided and redivided into infinity. His works reveal a vision of a realm in which physics and metaphysics, past and future, body and spirit, overlap like his painted grids, and where, as in a neo-platonic paradise, the mind can revel in the divine complexity of its own creations.

Jane Fudge

Jane Fudge is a visual art critic in Denver.

Clark Richert received a M.F.A. in Painting from the **University of Colorado** in Boulder and a B.F.A. in Fine Arts from the **University of Kansas** in Lawrence. Prestigious exhibitions include the *Criss-Cross Pattern Show* at **Hansen Gallery**, NYC, *Colorado 1990* at the **Denver Art Museum**, *Group Exhibitions* (1978-82) at **O.K. Harris Gallery**, NYC, and a *Solo Exhibition* at **Hopper Gallery** (actor Dennis Hopper's Gallery) in Taos, New Mexico.
Richert has received an *Artist's Fellowship* from the **National Endowment for the Arts** and was the co-recipient of **Buckminster Fuller's** *Dymaxion Award.*
TIME magazine reproduced a painting of Richert's in the 1963 *Great Ideas of Western Man* series produced by the **Container Corporation of America**. Works in public collections include the **Nelson-Atkins Museum, The Denver Art Museum**, and the **Wichita Art Museum**. Corporate collections such as **U.S.West**, Phoenix, **Fulenwider Corporation**, **Denver National Bank** lobby, Denver, **Container Corporation of America**, Chicago have Richert's work in their permanent collections.

PAYTON·RULE
1736 WAZEE DENVER COLORADO 80202
303 293 9080