

Nolan Simon

Appliance



Meadow Brook Art Gallery

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Nolan Simon

ONE-TWO-PERSON EXHIBITIONS

Nolan Simon: Drawings and Sculpture, Flux Gallery, Detroit, MI, 2002

To Scale: Nolan Simon and Jeff Haefner, U245 Gallery, Detroit, MI, 2002

The Travel Handbook of Lewis Mathback: Nolan Simon and Lucas Korte,
Macomb Community College, Clinton Twp., MI, 2000

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

Six, College for Creative Studies Fine Arts Gallery, Detroit, MI, 2004

Ordinary Things, Johansen Charles Gallery, Detroit, MI, 2004

The Billboard Project, Woodward Ave., Ferndale, MI, 2004

Actual Size, Detroit Contemporary, Detroit, MI, 2003

Detroit Now Traveling Exhibition, Urban Institute for Contemporary Art,
Grand Rapids, MI, 2003

Detroit Now, Detroit Artists Market, Detroit, MI, 2003

The Kirby Street Show, 547 E. Kirby, Detroit, MI, 2003

Holiday Show, Zoom Gallery, Detroit, MI, 2002

Detroit Contemporary Sculpture Garden Installation, Detroit Contemporary,
Detroit, MI, 2002

Michigan Legacy Art Park Installation, Thompsonville, MI, 2002

Actual Size, Detroit Contemporary, Detroit, MI, 2001

Art On the Move, Sculpture installation on the lawn of the Detroit
Institute for the Arts, Detroit, MI, 2001

EDUCATION

BFA, College for Creative Studies, 2004

Nolan Simon

October 16 - November 14, 2004

Curated by Dick Goody

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Oakland University

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The reductive economy of Nolan Simon's work speaks as much about its alliance with the currency of objects and commercial design as with its allegiance to the theories and practices of reductionism. That said, mostly his works are fascias, skin deep white surfaces which envelop the implied objectness beneath.

"Much of my research lately has been on advertising, product design, cultural criticism, physics, and consumerism."

(All bold italics by Nolan Simon)

Simon's work encompasses the practical life of operating, of driving, of using electrical devices, of being surrounded by sprayed, machined finishes and of the faceless facades of machines that evoke nothing but efficiency and ease. The eclectic epistemology of these works fuses the Minimalist aesthetics of artists like Donald Judd, the factory ethos of contemporary design and the anodyne whiteness of Formica.

An epidermis of pigment covering a faux appliance or support, these works are concrete objects. This suggests that they are

more literal than explicatory or expositive. While they address issues germane to both sculpture and paintings they operate independently of both. Simon's work, like that of Minimalist Art, above all, lies in the zone of "objecthood."

In his essay "Recentness of Sculpture," 1967, Clement Greenberg dismissed the tendency of what he described as "non-art" (non-painting/non-sculpture) as being nothing more than good design, closer to furniture than art: "Minimal works are readable as art, as almost anything is today – including a door, a table, or a blank sheet of paper... (it is) a kind of art nearer the condition of non-art." The same year, in his essay "Art and Objecthood," critic Michael Fried challenged Greenberg pointing out that the significance of such art was its very objectness: the "meaning in this context of 'the condition of non-art art' is what I have been calling objecthood." Fried considered Minimalist Art significant for two reasons. First, the central tenet of "objecthood" was clarity, in this case purity through the reductive economy of form. Hence, successful works had "a singleness of shape." The integrity of such

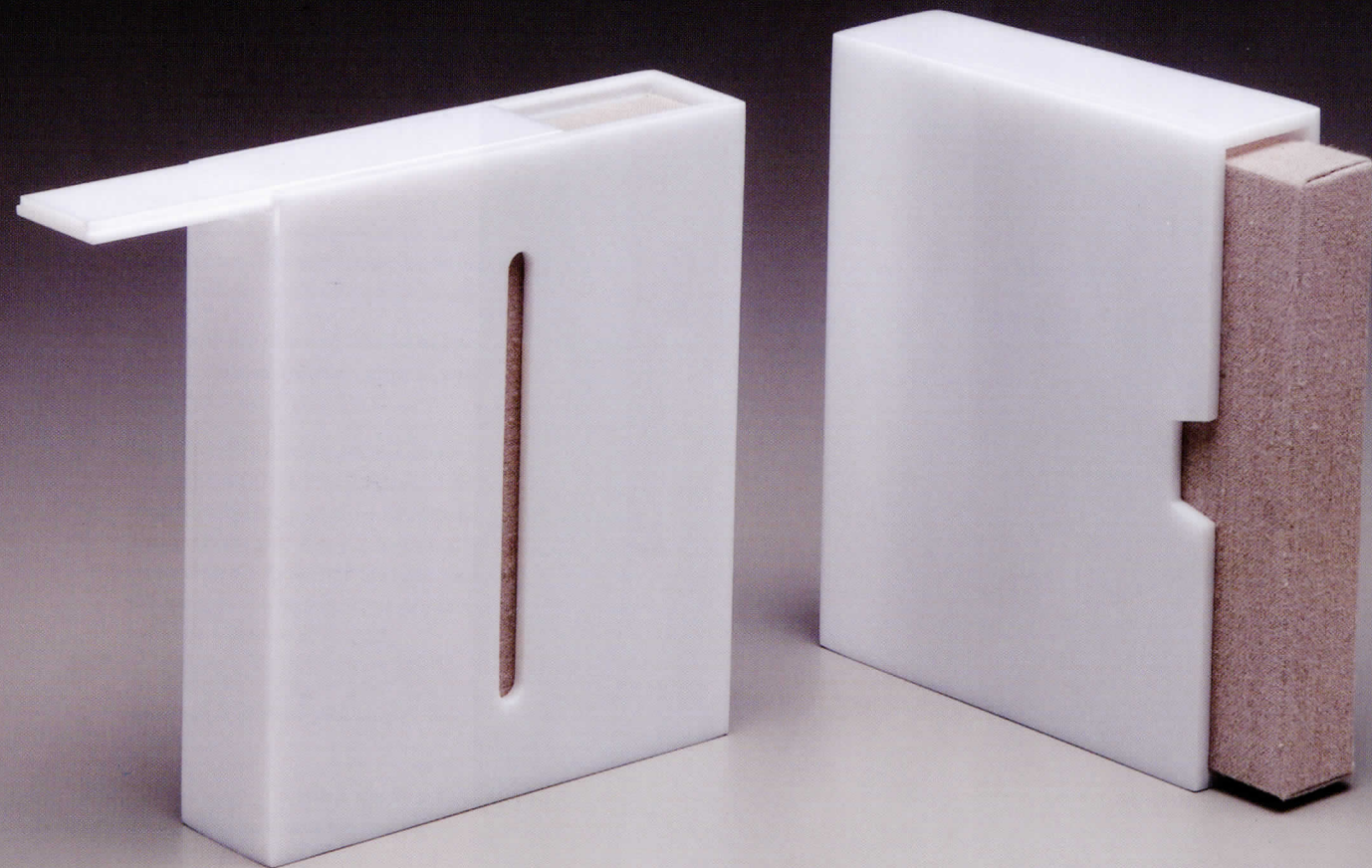


*Minimaltastic: Canvas Series
[Briefcase Edition]*

2004

19 x 19 x 2 inches

acrylic and stainless steel on Belgian linen canvas



objects came from the fact that unlike paintings they had no parts and so were unencumbered by pictorial concerns. Hence, the "wholeness of the object" was crucial to the Minimalist cause. Second, the way these so called objects were perceived (by an audience), according to Fried, was different than traditional art, the latter being read visually, the former experientially. Fried's contention was that the viewer encountered Minimal Art "theatrically" rather than passively. The human aspect (presence) was key to the way the art involved the viewer, i.e., the relationship between the work and those standing amongst (rather than in front of) the art (objects) was entirely removed from a conveyor belt approach of viewing traditional art. The "objecthood" of the object and the theatricality associated with it was at the core of Minimalist doctrine.

Nolan Simon's fascias convey a predilection for "objecthood," albeit in a recycled form, filtered through contemporary design's appropriation of minimalist aesthetics. His work also shares a partiality for what Fried described as "the literalist predilection for

symmetry" and the presentation of a parade of forms in order "one thing after another."

"In many ways I'm trying to use the look of minimalism to stand in for that which was once controversial, and is now everywhere. Minimalism has reached everyone's home through the hands of designers and architects. I'm trying to come to terms with that and pull back a little. My work in that sense is minimalism twice removed."

The various paradoxes posed in Simon's work preclude it being catalogued as minimalist revival. For example, his work *Minimaltastic: Canvas Series VI*, 2004, a white plexi box enclosing a linen canvas acts like a readymade encased. Neither the canvas nor the casing is dominant. These binary entities work together (or cancel one another out) rather like an abridged matryoshka (Russian nesting doll). The unprimed canvas operates in parody of the reductive "end of painting." The casing acts as homage to the painting, exulting it as its special receptacle, but at the same time

[LEFT]

Minimaltastic: Canvas Series VI

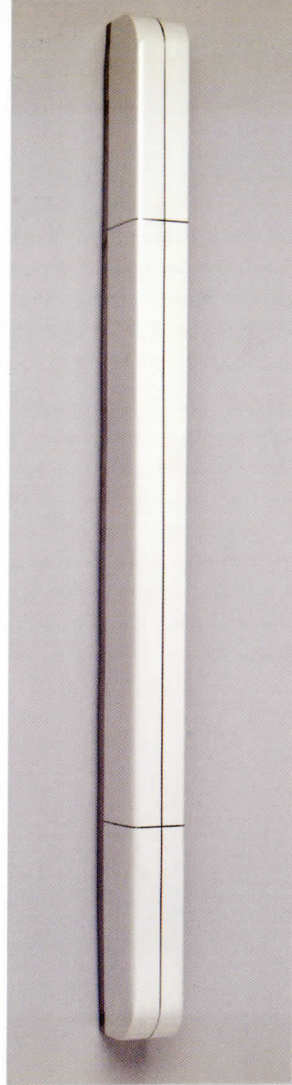
2004, 6 x 6 x 1.5 inches, acrylic on Belgian linen canvas

[RIGHT]

Minimaltastic: Canvas Series V2

2004, 4 x 6 x 6 x 1.5 inches, acrylic on Belgian linen canvas

6.

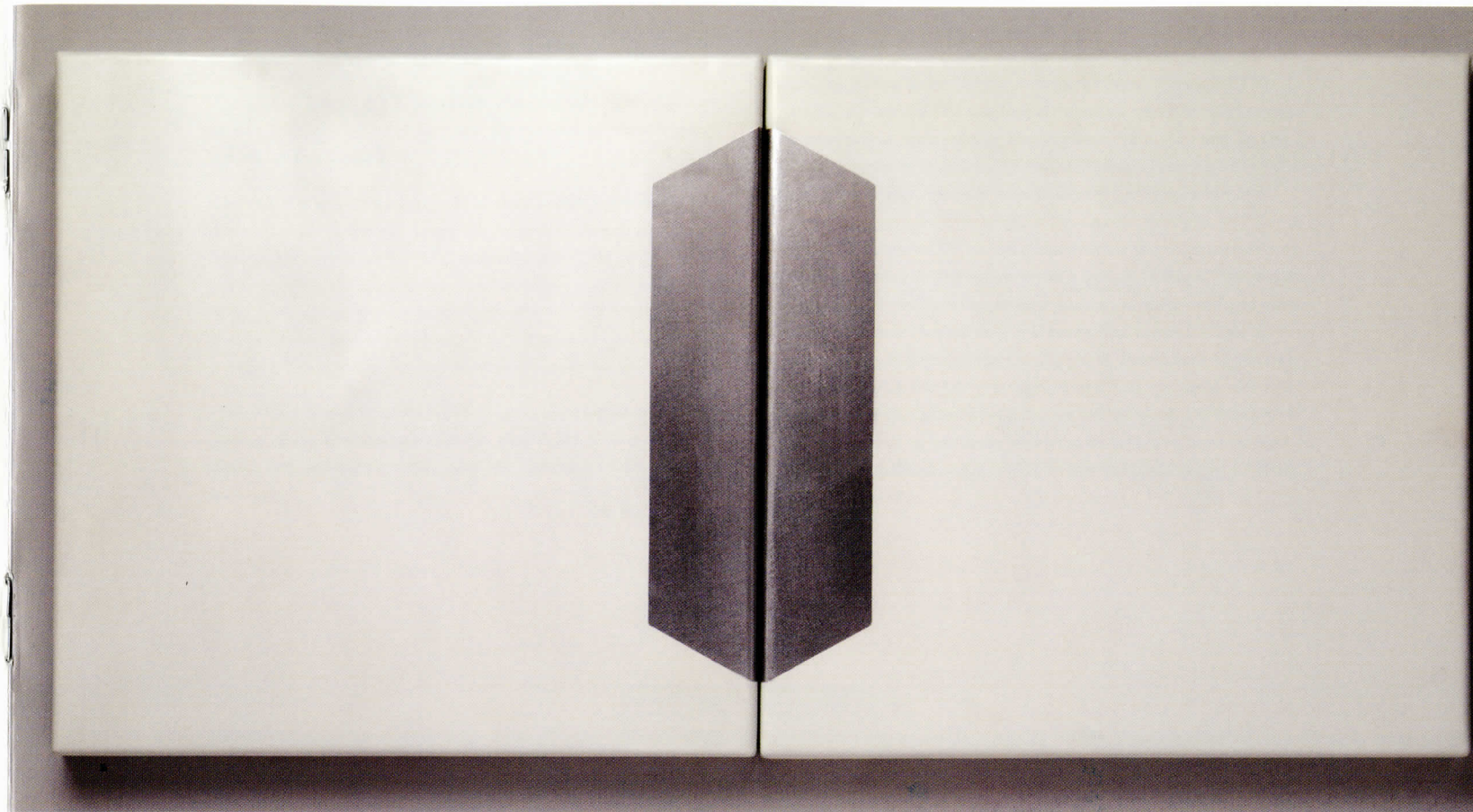


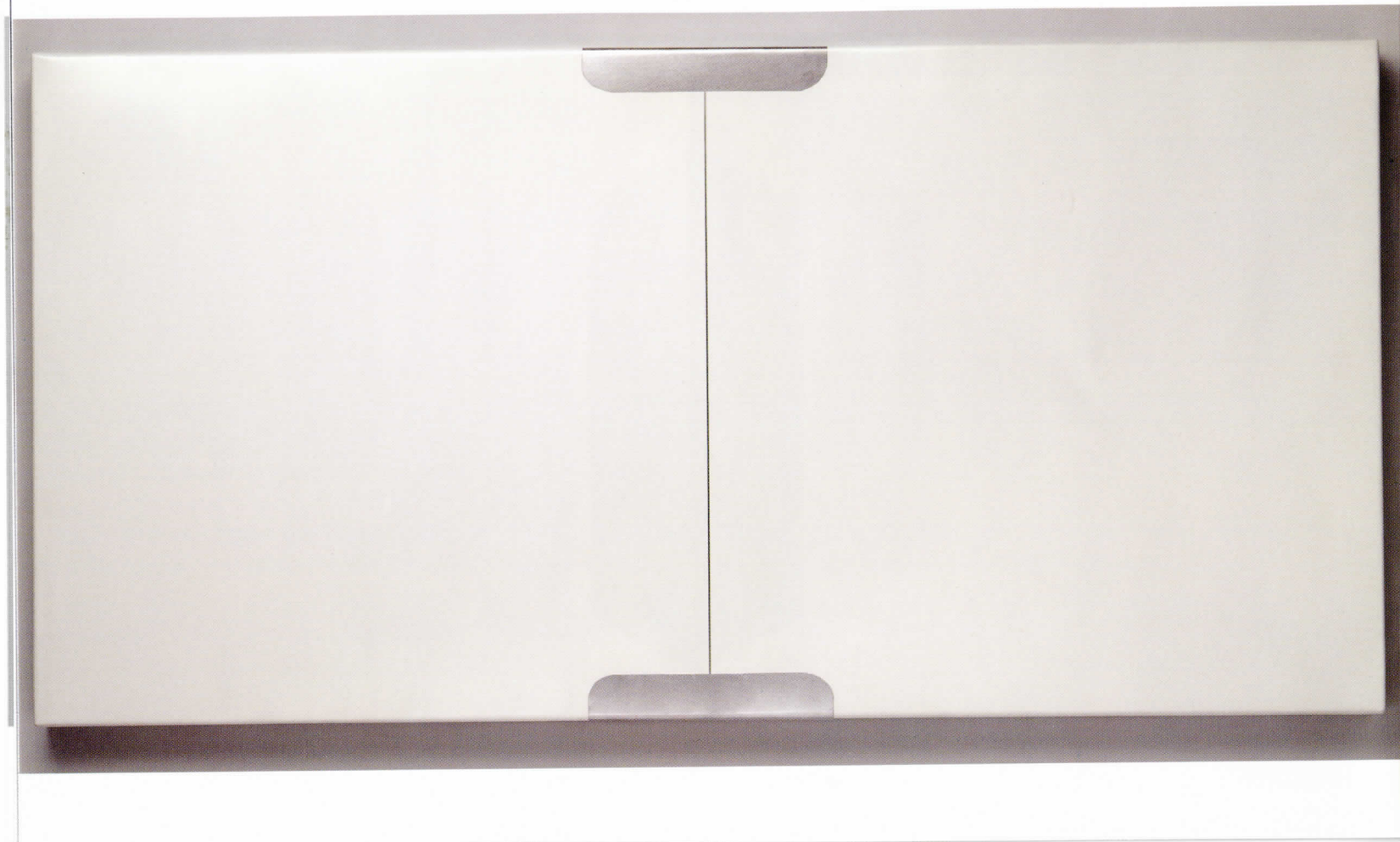
Appliance

2004, 38 x 2.5 x 3.5 inches, epoxy on stainless steel

Appliance

2004
19 x 38 x 2
epoxy on stainless steel





works to imprison it, teasing us, offering a slit of canvas in mockery, the implication being that "objecthood" has engulfed painting.

"I definitely align my work more with the conceptual artists of the mid/late 70s, and to some extent the appropriation artists of the late 80s."

There is nothing abstract about his work as there is nothing abstract about Richard Artschwager's Formica objects or Peter Halley's paintings. The skin of Simon's work and the shape beneath is the essence of its substance. This begs the question: what is it? Peter Halley's neo-geo work from the 80s and 90s and his parallel theoretical interest in Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulation, offer a helpful bridge in the reading of Nolan Simon's work.

"Thinking about this work has helped me decode bits and pieces of my environment. I hope that it leads to questions about art, capitalism, value, and the function of what we buy/own."

Baudrillard theory of simulation and simulacra is concerned with the way the media redefines things (cars, homes, pop stars) into ideal models which have little connection with the reality of actually driving a car, living in a house or being a musician. The media, particularly TV commercials, create a reality which operates in an idealized zone outside the mundane reality of everyday life. This hyperreality creates a disconnect between the actual and the perceived. It also makes it difficult to distinguish between one commercial and another because the simulation begins to blur any distinct differences. TV commercials present these idealizations to lure consumers. A kitchen becomes a temple of haute cuisine and design, but in reality it is merely a place to prepare food and wash dishes. Simon is interested in the forms that designers create in their materialistic conspiracy of consumer seduction. His fascination is with the simulation (images) and simulacra (signs) embodied in functional appliances whose casings and skins are pre-determined by a consensus of consumer stylists and marketing specialists. His work is an idolized presentment, a reflexive paradigm, an LCD of form and surface.

Appliance

2004, 20 x 44 x 2 inches, epoxy on stainless steel

"The art world is a business like any other, and this work is my attempt to see it as such. Given that the work in this show won't wash your clothes, clean your dishes, or walk your dog, can the viewer glean enough from these pieces to consider them worth something?"

From an art historical perspective, the minimal aspect and neutrality of Simon's work possesses an ironic flux encompassing both austerity, function and irony: that is to say, for example, the earnest formalistic austerity of Malevich, the functionalistic banality of Robert Gober's kitchen sinks from the 1980s, and the irony of Andrea Zittel's "living units" (Zittel was represented in the 2004 Whitney Biannual).

"I am constantly striving to be more concise."

Simon's development as an artist happened when popular music was revolutionized through the use of overlaid appropriated samplings. Simon samples art history and commerce as if they were congruent commodities, creating works that resonate and

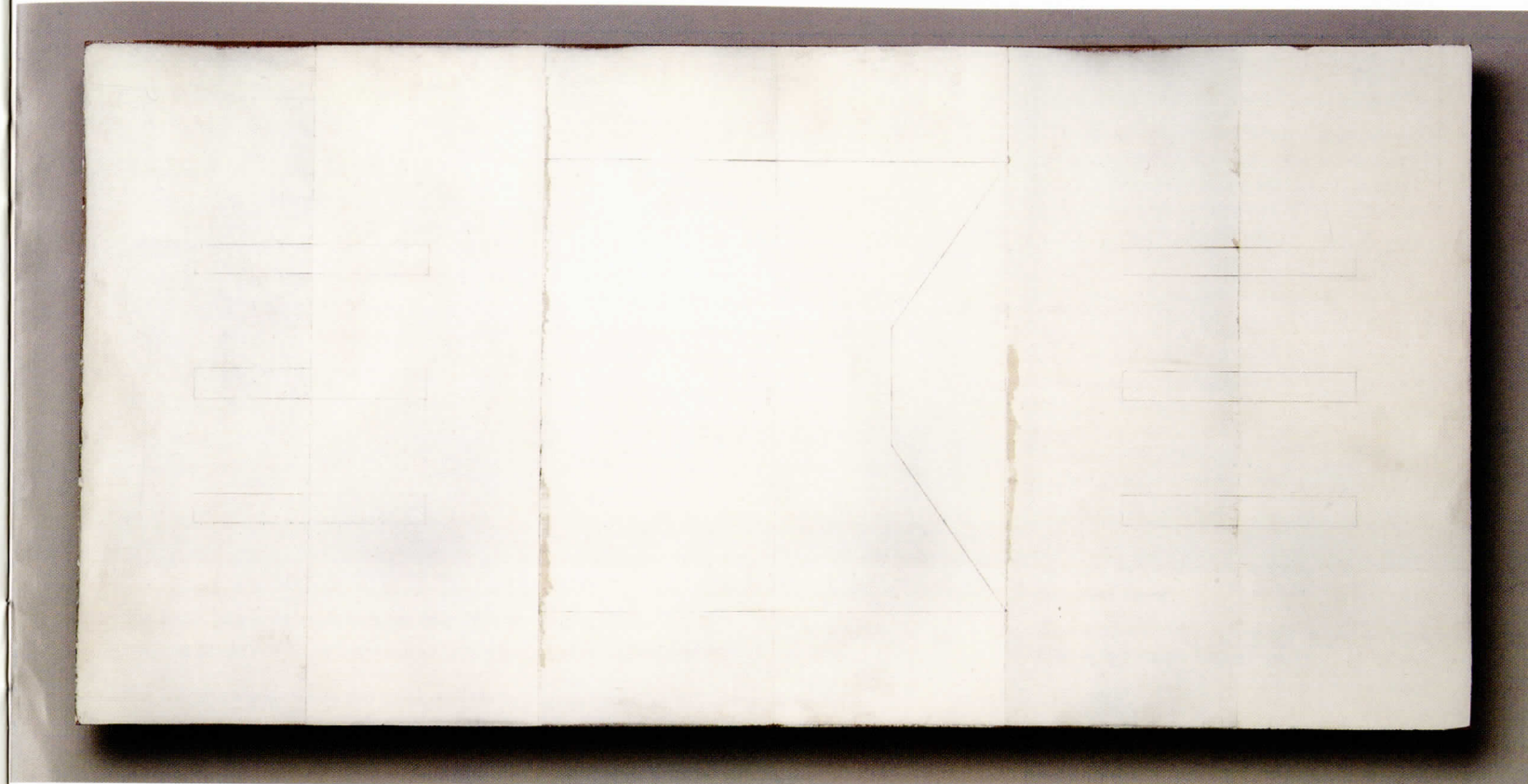
snap between a premeditated assessment of art and commerce and the delight in the materials and processes of industrial design.

"When creating work that is this visually simple, every decision becomes amplified. I use squares and rectangles because they reinforce the references I'm hoping to make to painting (art history), and appliances (commerce)."

Employing the indifferent elegance of painted metal and plastic, Nolan Simon's work delves with economic precision into the paradoxes of recent art history, the cynicism of commerce and the meticulous asceticism of contemporary design. His objects function as a subversive cultural critique and at the same time as a reflection mirroring the insidious fascias that wrap around the objects of everyday life.

Billboard (Collapse of the Giant)

2003, 24 x 48 x 1.5 inches, gesso and graphite on board



Appliance Billboard

2003

10 x 30 x 1.5 inches

epoxy on galvanized steel

Meadow Brook Art Gallery exhibitions are made possible through the generous contributions of individuals, companies and foundations.

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Meadow Brook Art Gallery apologizes for any inaccuracies or omissions.

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October 16 – November 14, 2004

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