

## ARTSITES '96

### wpa\corcoran at central armature

Christopher French, *Curator*

The art of Caryl Burtner, Matt Dibble, Larry Mullins, W. C. Richardson, Todd Rosenbaum, and Daniel Sullivan consciously straddles a line between sensuous materialism and metaphysical inquiry. To convey this duality between recognizable material forms and the shadowy identities they assert, these artists employ disparate styles, media, and subjects that variously take their inspiration from natural models or human innovations. At a time when the rapid, relentless pace of technological advance makes it sometimes seem that art objects are destined to become yet another outmoded commodity, Burtner, Mullins, Rosenbaum, and Sullivan embrace, often with an intensely purposeful primitivism, the human qualities of the handmade art object. On the other hand, Dibble, Richardson, and Turk emphasize mechanical strategies or devices as a means of codifying, determining, or understanding a personal perspective on physical existence.

Possessing the intimate scale and old-fashioned quality of a handmade sign, Larry Mullins' paintings seem, at first glance, oddly familiar. But the language he illuminates is that of a poet, not a marketer, and the more we look at his painted words, the more wonderfully foreign they seem. Titles such as *Brown Oysters*, *Dog Crazy*, and *Buck Downs* accurately summarize Mullins' texts, which, fulfilling the basic requirements of reportage, concisely articulate the elemental, slightly skewed character of persons, places, and things. This artist uses simple, descriptive words—nouns and adjectives, mostly—and his formal repertoire is similarly circumscribed to a very few straight lines and a host of overlapping, brightly colored circles. What makes this work singular is the boldness with which it fuses image and text into an emblematic abstraction. Like the intertwined words and images of medieval illuminated manuscripts, Mullins' painted pages are made radiant by the terms of their belief.



Larry Mullins, *Dog Crazy*, oil, oil stick on paper mounted on birch plywood, 1995