

# ARTnews

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## Alan Shields

Greenberg Van Doren



Alan Shields, *Dance Bag*, 1985, acrylic, canvas, glass beads, and thread on aluminum tubing and mirror, 48 x 40". Greenberg Van Doren.

Alan Shields, who died in 2005, was an American original. He belonged to no school but drew from many. By turns a hippie, a farmer, a fisherman, a ferryboat captain, and more, the Kansas-born artist eventually settled on Long Island and dug roots in high art (Abstract Expressionism, Conceptualism, geometric abstraction, Minimalism), craft (beads, stitchery, and collaged constructions), folk art (the compositions and symbols of Native American art), and the not-quite-fashion (homemade patchwork suits, which he wore, and lots of jewelry). His work is ebullient, rhythmic, and a genre unto itself.

This well-selected show of works from the '70s and '80s, varying from goofy to cheerful, prayerful, and well schooled, was assembled by independent curator Jill Brienza. The work here that best embodied Shields's spirit was *Dance Bag* (1985). Resembling at once a psychedelic teepee, a maypole, and Tatlin's Tower, it hangs suspended over a mirror and conveys motion by virtue of its reflections and incorporation of its viewers' movements. Composed of acrylic, canvas, glass beads, and thread on aluminum tubing, it touches on Shields's connections in the modern and traditional worlds of high and low art, both spiritual and intellectual.

His hilarious titles support parodic readings but also play off a kind of sincerity. *Diet Limca* (1980-81) is an ingenious hanging construction of cotton belting in tie-dye tones of red, blue, yellow, and green, lending the sense of a wall of windows onto the world beyond. Light activates the colors and gridded composition, creating motion and even an implied narrative as our eyes follow the pattern. The piece is surprisingly moody, the way Venetian blinds can be.

The paintings that were less graphic were less effective. *GREEN-EYED-GREEDY-GUT-EAT-The Whole World Up* (1983), for one, has an eerie transcendental quality, with light trying to break through, and a Pop-like array of facial features emerging. But *Finger Lickin'* (1974-76), celebrates and parodies Jackson Pollock, with smudges accompanied by string and beads. It offers a wonderful marriage of art, nature, and materialism. **BARBARA A. MacADAM**