

Stephen Dean at Henry Urbach - New York - Art exhibits
by Edward Leffingwell

A pulsing trumpet voluntary introduces the riot of found color that is *Volta* (2002-03), Stephen Dean's exuberant new single-channel DVD and fabric installation named for a soccer offense leading to a spectacular goal. Shot in Brazil at a dozen different games, this 8 1/2-minute video consists of seas of rapturous fans in the montage of color that Dean often features in his works. The opening sequence follows an undulating expanse of white rip-stop fabric. Boldly striped and lettered in red and green, the bunting is passed forward from hand to hand over the waving arms of a cheering crowd and, quickly gathered, disappears. Thousands of fists beat the air to joyous cries, drums pounding out the country's incessant African-Brazilian beat, while brightly colored banners stream over the bare chests or white and red shirts of legions of fans.

Equivalent to the choreographed human tide of the "wave," familiar to American football fans, the actions are intended to unite players and audience alike in a will to win. In *Volta*, a thousand kerchiefs twirl to unseen signals as banners intersect and overlay the scene. An announcer's voice goes electric, rising to crescendo as the audience cries "goal!" and explodes in victory. Flares of color cloud the air in yellow and red and green, followed by black smoke that rises and then dissipates as the orgy of color and movement comes to its end. There is no footage of the field and no shots of players in the game.

In an attempt to extend the video as sculptural experience, Dean introduced a tenting of multicolored bunting, the product of artisans from the hillside slums of Rio de Janeiro. The fabric was wrapped around the video screen and flowed out onto the floor. *Volta* seems less chaotic than *Pulse*, Dean's restless footage of the crowds and explosions of colored powder specific to a festival in India (which was included in the 2002 Whitney Biennial), although both are more about the experience of color than an exploration of crowd dynamics.

In another room, Dean presented *Balance* (346) and *Balance* (385), both 2003, two sculptures consisting of ordinary aluminum ladders leaning against the gallery wall with insets of panes of glass that have been vacuum-coated with metallic oxides. First adapted to sculptural form by Larry Bell in the late 1960s, dichroic glass looks one color in reflected light and another color when light passes through it. The results are pure, saturated, single wavelengths of light that appear to originate from within the glass. In comparison to *Volta*'s splendid riot, the quiet sculptures seem meditative and spare, almost passive.