

## PREFACE

For over twenty years, animal specimens, bizarre display cases, and scientific work tables have all been part of the visual repertoire of the American artist Mark Dion. His entire oeuvre has been shaped by a fascination with “nature,” and its capacity to turn human beings into collectors, researchers, and adventurers. The artist’s installations, interventions, performances, and photographs appear primarily as a critique of man’s frequently thoughtless and cruel treatment of the natural world, but his fundamental concern is with understanding the complex concepts of nature and society that are hidden behind our different ways of approaching them. In so doing, Dion exposes “nature” as a mere construct, which is subject to constant transformation and reinterpretation. An untouched nature, as such, has never existed. Rather, our images of nature and our treatment of it act as a mirror of society and its needs. Science has been accorded an enormously important role in the study of nature, given that its approach is based on objective knowledge; but for Dion it is merely one among several other equally valid methods of understanding it.

So in his current project, *Concerning Hunting*, the artist addresses hunting as a cultural practice that is rich in traditions, passionately pursued, and highly controversial. One of the main things that fascinates Dion about hunting is its fundamental contradiction: the hunter’s sensitivity to, and profound knowledge of, nature are, in the final analysis, manifested in the killing of animals. His various hunting lodges and blinds allow the visitor the opportunity both to empathize with the hunter’s view of nature and reflect on it critically, as they linger in the opulently furnished interiors. Thus at the center of Dion’s artistic analysis is, once again, not nature itself, but hunting as a form of cultural engagement with nature.

The exhibition has been adapted and variously presented in accordance with the local conditions of the institutions in which it is shown, with the result that the exciting development of the project can be followed, and new works and installations discovered in all five of the venues.

We would like to express our gratitude to Mark Dion and his engagement and enthusiasm for the project, and for the untiring contribution of Dana Sherwood and Hilmar