The works of Dan Kiacz draw the viewer back into a childhood landscape where bears, rabbits and antelope dance together around a campfire, where children sleep peacefully under the stars, or ride through the night sky on horseback. These surreal images are compelling because they represent a time period in our lives that we too quickly try to forget, that we move away from, that we grow out of. While a child may feel secure in this animal kingdom, as adults, we learn to fear nature. Thus, these mystical or mythical images melt away as we grow older and "wiser." However, children are clearly more attuned to the natural world in a way that is echoed in many traditional myths and legends, but these stories have all but disappeared in North American urban life, in part because they are no longer appreciated.

In this exhibition, Dan's paintings, screen prints, etchings and painted two-dimensional pots reveal a spiritual, intangible moment in time where even animals that are enemies play together at particular times. But when are these times? Almost all of these events take place at night, giving an enchanting ambiance to the work. The fires that are so prevalent in these images reveal events that may well be ceremonial, ritualistic, while caves envelope the scenes in a secure, home-like environment. Some of the narratives can also be understood as camping scenes, where humans and animals gather around a campfire, or rest in a cave. The fire provides light, heat, and a place for social interaction, it is the focal point of what people need. Here, worldly needs are stripped down to the most basic, primitive elements. The caves, which organize the compositions, also serve to remove the work from any specific location or time period, instead they have a more universal appeal in their simplicity.

Dan has said that he acts as a witness to these special events, and would even argue that these events actually do happen, we just never see them. They reflect legends and myths of the Southwest United States and Mexico, where ritual assumes a great importance in the structuring of life. Dan is primarily a printmaker, yet his particularly linear style is revealed in his paintings as well. To him, printing is like cooking, where the ingredients, or the materials are very tangible, and the process can obtain an even greater importance than the end result. The process assumes the role of the ritual, and is celebratory in nature. Here, the spectator is invited to participate in these images, where narratives are recipes and colors are flavors.

The paintings, done with acrylic paint on masonite, are very slick, flat, they reveal large areas of black, with linear figures, bright colors and slight flecks of color that swirl through the work. Colors tend to dominate these works, where the dark night sky is contrasted with the bright yellow and orange of the fire and the deep blues, reds, greens, pinks and purples of the landscape and animals. In the serigraph Child's Moon of 1994, a closely cropped cactus curves into the shape of the half-moon, formed by a deep blue and turquoise green with bright yellow and red thorns, set against a blue and yellow background. New Mexican folk art and contemporary art have both influenced Dan's choice of color and texture, yet his compositions and subjects are unique. They draw instead upon the mystical nature of native American verbal and textual legends. These visual images are very layered, and the forms display a delicate line of color. In his paintings, Dan uses a very thin brush to outline the forms, and fills in color with an airbrush, always working as a printmaker.

Dan's first painting from this exhibition series, entitled Desert Dreams, dates 1990. Here, a child sleeps undisturbed on the desert ground under a starlit sky, his guitar and sombrero resting beside him, while a fox sleeps next to him and a procession of animals pass through the distant landscape. The surreal setting, bright colors and flat texture recalls Henri
Rousseau. However, in later works of the same theme, such as *Three Bears* from 1995, the animals assume a greater role in the narrative, while humans disappear. Here, the spectator alone enters the scene, where animals are interacting in a way we typically consider to be human behavior patterns. Bears dance, sing, flap their paws, antelope prance on their back two legs, rabbits kick up their feet. Animals have now gained a more self-confident stance, a more carefree manner, a more humorous interaction. Bears in particular seem to carry more human traits. Many North American legends relate to them, giving them an appeal that transcends their more ferocious nature. The tendency to humanize animals reveals a desire to understand animals, to relate to animals, to draw them into our domain. This desire, which is almost international, is best represented in children's literature, such as in Kipling's *Jungle Book*. Dan's latest work in this exhibition is a series of paintings that resemble ceramic pots. While pots are usually considered to be three-dimensional containers, traditionally made of fired clay, terra-cotta, these vessels are flat forms, with merely the outline of the pot carved out of wood to reveal its identity. These pots are not functional, you cannot see inside of them, they deny the characteristics of a "pot," and instead reveal an interest in the image painted on the exterior, which is framed by the curved shape of the wood. These images of animals and landscapes are similar to those found in Dan's paintings, but here they take on the quality of an artifact. Acting as ceramic pots, they carry a more overtly archaeological meaning.

Dan clearly prefers to portray animals than people. In printmaking, the process itself assumes a great importance, given that prints work in multiples and are created from outlined images. Therefore, photographs found in travel magazines or nature guides are often the inspiration for the posing of Dan's animals. However, the way that the animals interact is more important in these works than their actual natural appearance. These works create a surreal image of the animal kingdom where humans and animals interaction peacefully and playfully. The spectator, then, is drawn into these images at the level of the child, and is asked to enjoy the work without any of the preconceptions of nature acquired in adulthood.

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ARTIST STATEMENT

DAN KIA CZ:

HOME OF THE ANIMAL KING

My images come from my home, the Southwest. They are a combination of the work seen through the eyes of a child and the harmony we seek throughout our lives.

Through the use of color and texture, humor and seriousness, I seek to convey the sense of harmony, joy and wonderment that is lost in most of us between childhood and becoming an adult. Yet we seek these “child’s eyes” for all our lives—to be whole again, to deal with the moment, to find joy in all.

The animals both tame and wild are the images of all things natural. We have a fear of them for these are creatures beyond our control, yet we are drawn to them with a need to touch, to be in harmony and accepted by them.

My use of the night, the fact that most of my images are in darkness, is because this is the time of dreams, the time when all things are possible; the child’s moon.

To return or reunite the viewer with some of these feelings, this is my goal.

Checklist of the Exhibition

PRINTS

1. CHAPALA,
   Serigraph, 1992. 11" x 9"
2. CHILDREN’S MOON,
   Serigraph, 1993. 11" x 9"
3. SPOTTED CACTUS,
   Serigraph, 1993. 12" x 10"
4. SNOW CACTUS,
   Serigraph, 1994. 12" x 10"
5. DANCING DUO,
   Serigraph, 1995. 20" x 16"  
6. STARLIGHT,
   Serigraph, 1995. 20" x 16"

PAINTINGS

7. RAVEN POT,
   Acrylic on Wood, 1994. 12" x 13"  
8. BLACK POT,
   Acrylic on Wood, 1994. 23" x 23"  
9. FIRE BOWL,
   Acrylic on Masonite, 1994. 17" x 38"  
10. FLASH POT,
    Acrylic on Wood, 1994. 10" x 16"  
11. GOURD POT,
    Acrylic on Wood, 1995. 19" x 32"  
12. SHOOTING STARS,
    Acrylic on Wood, 1995. 30" x 34"  
13. DEER POT,
    Acrylic on Wood, 1995. 29" x 35"  
14. BELL BASKET,
    Acrylic on Masonite, 1995. 32" x 38"  
15. DESERT DREAM,
    Acrylic on Masonite, 1990. 34" x 44"  
16. GOIN’ FISHIN’,
    Acrylic on Masonite, 1990. 38" x 48"  
17. PRAIRIE PALS,
    Acrylic on Masonite, 1991. 34" x 44"  
18. CAVE PAINTER,
    Acrylic on Masonite, 1991. 44" x 34"  
19. DESERT FIRE,
    Acrylic on Masonite, 1991. 36" x 48"  
20. MIDNIGHT MENAGERIE,
    Acrylic on Masonite, 1992. 28" x 44"  
21. DANCING BEARS,
    Acrylic on Masonite, 1994. 32" x 44"  
22. LITTLE DOG,
    Acrylic on Masonite, 1994. 48" x 40"  
23. DOGS ‘N FROGS,
    Acrylic on Masonite, 1995. 40" x 48"  
24. FIRE BEAR,
    Acrylic on Masonite, 1995. 36" x 30"