

**Haluk Akakçe,
Illusion of the First Time
Whitney Museum of American Art
at Philip Morris, through Jan 10
(see Museums).**

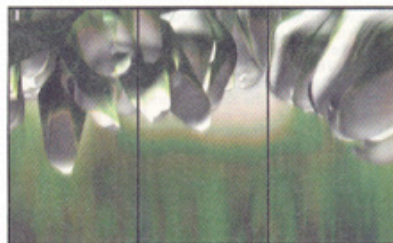
Like a marathon runner who gains strength from every cup of water along the way, New York-based, Turkish-born artist Haluk Akakçe has improved by leaps and bounds over the course of the numerous international exhibitions he's had this year. Now back in the U.S. with a pocketful of fresh experimental tricks, Akakçe here fuses architecture, painting, video, digital technology and sound, transforming the WMAA at Philip Morris into a Conceptual art oasis in midtown.

Akakçe's installation, *Illusion of the First Time*, literally begins at the door. The artist has modified the gallery's glass entryway by adhering onto its surface strips of black vinyl, whose patterning resembles an abstract painting. Passing through this painterly veil, one immediately confronts a black wall punctuated with three bold,

white intersecting stripes. On the right hangs a framed pane of black glass with a small cut-out area revealing a handwritten question on a sheet of paper underneath: WHY MUST WE BE SO DIFFERENT FROM WHO WE THINK WE ARE? Next, one encounters another white stripe painted on an adjacent wall, which fades slowly to black as it climbs toward the ceiling. Crossing this final line, one arrives at the work's inner sanctum, a darkened room equipped with benches for contemplating a 12' x 18' digital "painting" in the form of a video emanating from three synchronized projectors.

This video component is an ambiguous eight-minute animation in three movements: The first is a meditation on a black swaying line that expands into a threatening army of hands. Ambient sound, composed by Michael

Vecchio, is introduced in the second movement as flowing stripes morph into spiraling plant life before swelling into a wash of white light. In the third part, flat mechanical cyber-blossoms drift upward and multiply across a luscious colored field, accompanied by the tranquil rhythm of a harpsichord. Drawing on the ability of abstraction to cleanse the spiritual palette, Akakçe's surprisingly romantic vision leaves the viewer feeling refreshed and renewed.—Paul Laster



Haluk Akakçe, *Illusion of the First Time*, detail, 2002.