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art

Talent Home-Grown

David Nyzio might be best known for the unconventional materials he's used in his art over the past ten years, but it's the sculptures and photographs, not their media (algae, milkweed bugs, moss, and butterfly wings) that have consistently caught attention first. Nyzio's workmanship is so meticulous, in fact, that some people will see his latest show (Postmasters Gallery, 459 West 19th Street; through March 13) and never guess that his green silk-screen-like images on paper (below, *Bacteria Rule*) and glass are made by suspending a photographic negative over a sheet of paper or glass immersed in a pool of water with algae. Or that the shimmering squares of blue, arranged in rows on a board as though painted, are actually punched-out butterfly wings. Nyzio's manipulations conceal processes that are anything but predictable. To create his newest work, an engraving on a steel plate that depicts a sculpture of the *Discus Thrower* in various positions, the artist called the Metropolitan Museum to ask where the nearest version of the sculpture could be found (at a TriBeCa school, it turned out), then photographed it more than 100 times from different heights

and distances. He used only seven. No matter. "I wanted to do a piece that would explore the way light reflects off a line engraved in steel," he says. It works, too—when you walk by the piece from left to right, the images appear to be spinning. His algae "photographs" may reflect a two- or five-month growth period, depending on the effects he wants to achieve. Drying out the paper or glass early allows for a more defined image, he says, while a more mature piece will verge on abstraction. Sometimes, even Nyzio's messiest mistakes have produced surprising results. "I did a piece once with agar, a gelatin extracted from red algae, and I dumped the excess on my studio floor," he says. A few weeks later, he noticed that water

had evaporated from the pudding-like mass, leaving a hardened amber-colored substance. He began casting agar in different shapes—nuts and bolts and structural components—and assembled them into a coffee-table base. Why not? "I think that most people have a rigid idea of what they want to accomplish and don't realize the possibilities outside a specific goal," he says. "I'm always trying to be aware of the periphery." **EDITH NEWHALL**

