DAVID NOLAN GALLERY

MEL KENDRICK

MEL KENDRICK
Born 1949 in Boston, MA
Lives and works in New York, NY

Education

1971 B.A., Trinity College, Hartford, CT
1973 M.A., Hunter College, New York, NY

Selected Solo Exhibitions

2022 *Mel Kendrick: Seeing Things in Things*, Parrish Art Museum, Watermill, NY
2021 *Mel Kendrick: Seeing Things in Things,* Addison Gallery of American Art, Andover, MA
Mel Kendrick, David Nolan Gallery, New York, NY
Mel Kendrick: Wood, Sculpture, Paper, Hill Gallery, Birmingham, MI
2017 *Mel Kendrick: Woodblock Drawings*, David Nolan Gallery, New York, NY
Mel Kendrick: Early Woodprints / Recent Sculpture, The Drawing Room, East Hampton, New York, NY
Mel Kendrick, Sarah Moody Gallery, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, AL
2016 *Mel Kendrick: Cell Drawings*, The Drawing Room, East Hampton, NY
2015 *Mel Kendrick: sub-stratum*, David Nolan Gallery, New York, NY
Mel Kendrick: Marker #1 and *Marker #2,* Grant Park - Queen's Landing, Chicago, IL
2014 *Mel Kendrick: Water Drawings*, David Nolan Gallery, New York, NY
2013 *Sculpture*, The Drawing Room, East Hampton, New York, NY
2012 *Mel Kendrick: Prototypes*, The A.D. Gallery at the University of North Carolina, Pembroke, NC
2011 *jacks,* Parrish Art Museum, Southampton, New York, NY
Works from 1995 to Now, David Nolan Gallery, New York, NY
jacks, Mary Boone Gallery, New York, NY
jacks, The Fields Sculpture Park at Omi International Art Center, Ghent, NY
Mel Kendrick: 5 Small Sculptures, Margo Leavin Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
2010 *Object Negatives*, The Drawing Room, East Hampton, NY
2009 *Markers,* Madison Square Park, New York, NY
2008 *Loopholes*, Dieu Donné, New York, NY
Sculptures, David Floria Gallery, Aspen, CO
Study for a Monument, David Nolan Gallery, New York, NY
2007 *Red Blocks,* David Nolan Gallery, New York, NY
2006 *Mel Kendrick*, The College of Wooster Art Museum, Wooster, OH
2003 *Drawings in Wood,* David Nolan Gallery, New York, NY
2002 *Core Samples,* Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH
1999 *Monumental Prints,* Tampa Museum of Arts, Tampa, FL
1997 *Parallel Structures*, Rosenwald-Wolf Gallery, University of the Arts, Philadelphia, PA
1996 *Mel Kendrick*, Grand Arts, Kansas City, MO (catalogue with essay by Klaus Kertess)
1995 John Weber Gallery, New York, NY
1994 *Black Oil Works: Sculpture and Drawings*, Gerald Peters Gallery, Dallas, TX
John Weber Gallery, New York, NY
1993 *Black Oil Works: Sculpture and Drawings*, Grimaldis Gallery, Baltimore, MD
John Weber Gallery, New York, NY
1992 Margo Leavin Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
John Weber Gallery, New York, NY
Black Oil Works: Sculpture and Drawings 1991-92, Weatherspoon Art Gallery, University of North Carolina, Greensboro, NC
1991 Galerie Carola Mosch, Berlin, Germany
1990 Margo Leavin Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
1989 Salama-Caro Gallery, London, UK
John Weber Gallery, New York, NY
1988-90 *Essays: Small Wood Works,* The Austin Arts Center, Trinity College, Hartford, CT; Traveled to Lehman College Art Gallery, Bronx, NY; Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, MD; High Museum of Art, Atlanta, GA; Cleveland Center for Contemporary Art, Cleveland, OH
1988 Margo Leavin Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
Forum Kunstmesse, Hamburg, John Weber Gallery, New York, NY
1987 *Currents 34: Mel Kendrick*, St. Louis Art Museum, Forest Park, MO
John Weber Gallery, New York, NY
1986-87 *Recent Sculpture,* University Gallery, University of Massachusetts, Amherst; Traveled to Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, TX; Neuberger Museum, State University of New York, Purchase, NY
1986 Barbara Krakow Gallery, Boston, MA
1985 John Weber Gallery, New York, NY
Margo Leavin Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
1983 John Weber Gallery, New York, NY

Margo Leavin Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
1982 Carol Taylor Art, Dallas, TX
1981 Jorgensen Gallery, University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT
1980 John Weber Gallery, New York, NY
1979 A.M. Sachs Gallery, New York, NY
1974 *Mel Kendrick: Sculpture*, Artists Space, New York, NY

Selected Group Exhibitions

2022 *Spatial Awareness: Drawings from the Permanent Collections*, The Menil Collection, Houston, TX
2021 *Monira Foundation Presents: Longing for Something*, Mana Contemporary, Jersey City, NJ
Art + Object: Group Exhibition, Hill Gallery, Birmingham, MI
Whimsy, Southampton Arts Center, Southampton, New York, NY
2020 *Reframing Minimalism*, Richard Gray Gallery, New York, NY
2019 *The Eighties*, David Nolan Gallery, New York, NY
2018 Sculpture Milwaukee, Wisconsin Avenue, Milwaukee, WI
Grit and Sensitivity, Alta Ham Fine Arts, University of Nevada, Las Vegas Nevada
Paper/Print: American Hand Papermaking, 1960s to Today, IPCNY, New York, NY
Poetry: From Sappho to the Beats, Arion Press, San Francisco, CA
2017-18 *Disorderly Conduct: American Painting and Sculpture, 1960-1990*, Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, NC
2016 *drawing ROOM*: Curated by Markus Dochantschi, David Nolan Gallery, New York, NY
Sculptural Drawings: Mel Kendrick, John Newman, Chris Macdonald, Anders Wahlstedt Fine Art, New York, NY
2015 *Piece Work* (organized by Robert Storr), Yale University School of Art, New Haven, CT
2013 *Invitational Exhibition of Visual Arts*, American Academy of Arts and Letters, NY
Robert Kelly and Mel Kendrick: Paintings, Sculptures and Prints, Quintenz & Company Fine Art, Aspen, CO
Come Together: Surviving Sandy, Industry City, Brooklyn, NY
2012 *Large Drawings,* David Nolan Gallery, New York, NY
Reinventing Landscape, Sidney Mishkin Gallery, Baruch College, New York, NY
You Would, Kathleen Cullen, New York, NY
2010 *Marker III* at The Fields Sculpture Park, Omi Art, Ghent, New York, NY
Rites of Spring, LongHouse Reserve, East Hampton, New York, NY
The Visible Vagina, David Nolan Gallery, New York, NY
2009 *Woodcuts Now*, Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, MD
2008 *Roller Coaster in the Dark*, Galeria Janet Kurnatowski, Brooklyn, NY
2006 *Turning Point,* ASU Art Museum, Tempe, AZ
2005 *Paper*, Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery, New York, NY
2004 9th Annual Exhibition, National Academy of Art and Design, New York, NY
Raoul de Keyser, Suzan Frecon, Mel Kendrick, Uwe Kowski, Thomas Nozkowski, Gorney Bravin + Lee, New York, NY
Drop Out, Photography Show, Julie Saul Gallery, New York, NY
Perspectives@25 - A Quarter Century of New Art in Houston, Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, TX
2003 Carpenter Center, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA
2002 *Sitelines*, Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, MA
Sculpture, Margo Leavin Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
1997 *New Installations*, Grounds for Sculpture, Hamilton, NJ
1996 *Aspects of Abstraction: Albers, Gabo, Judd, Kendrick, McLaughlin, Pollack*, Addison Gallery, Phillips Academy, Andover, MA
Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, MA
1995 *25 Years: An Exhibition of Selected Works,* Margo Leavin Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
News, Surprise, and Nostalgia, The Bertha and Karl Leubsdorf Art Gallery, Hunter College, New York, NY
1994 *Eight Contemporary Sculptors: Beyond Nature, Wood into Art,* Lowe Art Museum, University of Miami, FL
Low Tech, organized by the Center for Research in Contemporary Art, The University of Texas, Arlington, TX
Some Like it Cool, Barbara Krakow Gallery, Boston, MA
Mel Kendrick/Richard Prince, Offshore Gallery, East Hampton, New York, NY
First Fundraising Benefit American Fine Arts, American Fine Arts, New York, NY
1993 *Drawings*, American Academy of Arts & Letters, New York, NY
1992 *A Passion for Art,* Tony Shafrazi Gallery, New York, NY
Show of the Year, John Weber Gallery, New York, NY
Volume 6, Contemporary Sculptors, Guild Hall Museum, New York, NY
A Selection of Recent Work, Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, MA
1991 *Dead Horses,* Disfigured Love, Lawrence Monk, New York, NY
ARCO, Madrid, Spain
American Abstraction at the Addison, The Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, MA
Katonah Museum of Art, Katonah, NY
Large Scale Sculpture, John Weber Gallery, New York, NY
A Bestiary, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, NY
Sculpture Exhibition, Margo Leavin Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
Prints, John Weber Gallery, New York, NY
Art on Paper, Weatherspoon Art Gallery, University of North Carolina, Greensboro, NC
1990 *Editions Ilene Kurtz and Other Prints*, Krygier/Landau Contemporary Art, Santa Monica, CA
Funf Jahre Zeitgenossische Kunst, Galerie Marie-Louise Wirth, Zurich
Grimaldis Gallery, Baltimore, MD
Summer Exhibition, John Weber Gallery, New York, NY

Baltimore Collects Painting & Sculpture, 1960-1990, Baltimore Museum of Art, MD
Budapest Triennial: Nancy Graves, Mel Kendrick, and Joel Shapiro, curated by Joan Simon, Budapest, Hungary
Prints & Multiples, Krygier/Landau Contemporary Art, Santa Monica, CA

1989 *4 Americans: Aspects of Current Sculpture*, The Brooklyn Museum, New York, NY
American Sculptures: New York-Los Angeles, Kamakura Gallery, Kamakura, Japan
Artists of the 80's: Selected Works from The Maslow Collection, Sordoni Art Gallery, Wilkes College, Wilkes-Barre, PA
Out of Wood: Recent Sculpture, Whitney Museum of American Art at Philip Morris, New York, NY

1988 *BIGlittle Sculpture,* curated by Phyllis Tuchman, Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown, MA
Lynda Benglis, John Chamberlain, Joel Fisher, Mel Kendrick, Robert Therrien, Magazine, Stockholm, Sweden
Innovations in Sculpture 1985-1988, curated by Ellen M. O'Donnell, Aldrich Museum, Ridgefield, CT
Art of the 80s, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY
24 Cubes, curated by Saul Ostrow, University Gallery, University of Massachusetts at Amherst, MA

1987 *The Allusive Object: Mel Kendrick, Robert Lobe, Judith Shea*, Barbara Krakow Gallery, Boston, MA
American Sculpture: Investigations, Larry Bell, Tony Berlant, Allan Hacklin, Donald Judd, Mel Kendrick, Donald Lipski, Jesus Bautista Moroles, Judy Pfaff, James Surls, Michael Todd, McClain Gallery, Houston, TX
Joel Fisher, Robert Lobe, Mel Kendrick, Blum Helman Gallery, New York, NY
1987 Invitational, New Britain Museum of American Art, CT

1986 *Sculpture*: Ahearn Duff Hunt Kendrick Otterness Shapiro Zadikian, Tony Shafrazi Gallery, New York, NY

1985 *Newman, Dunham, Kendrick, Richter, Artschwager*, curated by Klaus Kertess, International with Monument, New York, NY
Biennial Exhibition, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY

1984 *The International Survey of Painting & Sculpture,* Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY
The Tremaine Collection: 20th Century Masters, Wadsworth Antheneum, Hartford, CT
Drawings by Sculptors: Two Decades of Non-Objective Art in the Seagrams Collection, curated by David Bellman, Seagrams Building, New York, NY; traveled to Montreal Museum of Fine Art, Montreal, Canada; Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver, Canada; The Nickle Art Museum, Calgary, Canada
American Sculpture, Margo Leavin Gallery, Los Angeles, CA

1983 *Concepts in Construction: 1910-1980*, curated by Irving Sandler for Independent Curators Incorporated, Tyler Museum of Art, Tyler, TX; traveled to Norton Gallery, West Palm Beach, FL; Cincinnati Art Museum, Cincinnati, OH; Long Beach Museum of Art, Long Beach, CA; Neuberger Museum, SUNY Purchase, NY
New Biomorphism and Automatism, Hamilton Gallery, New York, NY
Contemporary Sculpture, S.U.N.Y., New Paltz, New York, NY
Groover, Hunt, Kendrick, Blum Helman Gallery, New York, NY

1982 *New Drawing in America,* Sutton Place Guildford, Surrey, UK

Awards & Grants

2008 Francis J. Greenburger Award
2002 Recipient of Academy Award for Art, American Academy of Arts & Letters
1994 National Endowment for the Arts, Fellowship
1981 National Endowment for the Arts, Fellowship
1978 National Endowment for the Arts, Fellowship
1974 CAPS Grant

Public Collections

Addison Gallery of American Art, Andover, MA
The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL
Australian National Gallery, Canberra, Australia
The Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, MD
Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Brunswick, ME
Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY
Centro Cultural Arte Contemporaneo, Mexico City, Mexico
Daimler Kunst Sammlung, Berlin, Germany
Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, TX
Grounds for Sculpture, Hamilton, NJ
High Museum of Art, Atlanta, GA
Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY
The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minneapolis, MN
The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA
The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX
Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY
Nasher Museum of Art, Durham, NC
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.
Neuberger Museum, State University of New York, Purchase, NY
New Britain Museum of American Art, New Britain, Ct
OMI International Arts Center, Ghent, NY
Orlando Museum of Art, Orlando, FL
Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, NY
Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA
Prudential Life Insurance Company, Newark, NJ
St. Louis Art Museum, Saint Louis, MO
Storm King Art Center, Storm King, NY

Tampa Museum of Art, Tampa, FL
The Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, OH
Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN
The Whitney Museum of American Art, NY
Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT

Installation view of *Seeing Things in Things*, Parrish Museum, Watermill NY, 2022

Installation view of *Seeing Things in Things*, Parrish Museum, Watermill NY, 2022

Installation view of *Seeing Things in Things*, Parrish Museum, Watermill NY, 2022

Mel Kendrick: Seeing Things in Things, Addison Gallery of American Art, Andover, MA, 2021

Mel Kendrick: Seeing Things in Things, Addison Gallery of American Art, Andover, MA, 2021

Mel Kendrick: Seeing Things in Things, Addison Gallery of American Art, Andover, MA, 2021

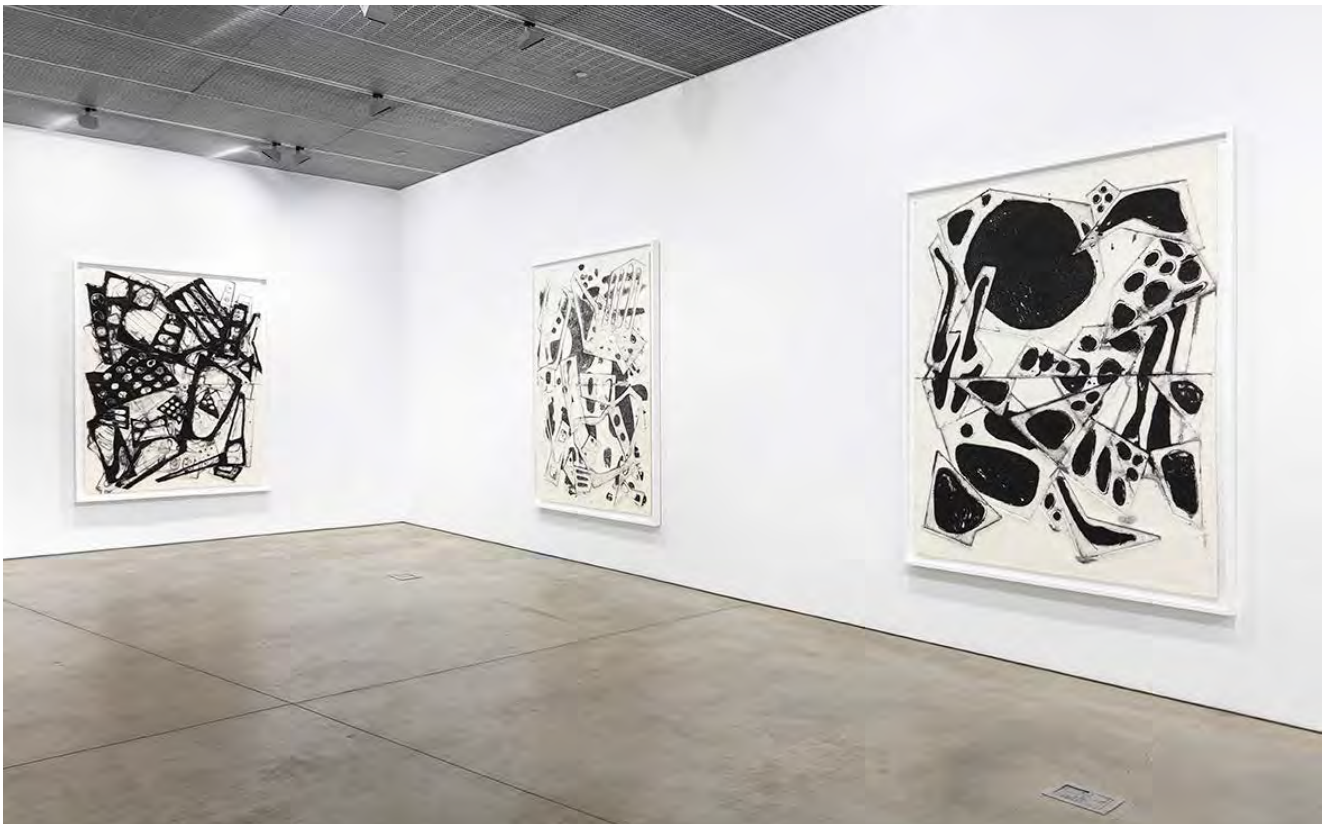
Mel Kendrick: Woodblock Drawings, David Nolan Gallery, New York, NY 2017

Mel Kendrick: Marker #1 and *Marker #2,* Grant Park - Queen's Landing, Chicago, IL, 2015

Mel Kendrick: Marker #1 and *Marker #2,* Grant Park - Queen's Landing, Chicago, IL, 2015

Mel Kendrick: sub-stratum, David Nolan Gallery, New York, NY, 2015

Mel Kendrick: sub-stratum, David Nolan Gallery, New York, NY, 2015



Mel Kendrick: Water Drawings, David Nolan Gallery, New York, NY, 2014

Mel Kendrick: Water Drawings, David Nolan Gallery, New York, NY, 2014

Mel Kendrick: Water Drawings, David Nolan Gallery, New York, NY, 2014

jacks, Parrish Art Museum, Southampton, New York, NY, 2011

jacks, Mary Boone Gallery, New York, NY, 2011

jacks, The Fields Sculpture Park at Omi International Art Center, Ghent, NY, 2011

Works from 1995 to Now, David Nolan Gallery, New York, NY, 2011

Markers, Madison Square Park, New York, NY, 2009

Red Blocks, David Nolan Gallery, New York, NY, 2007

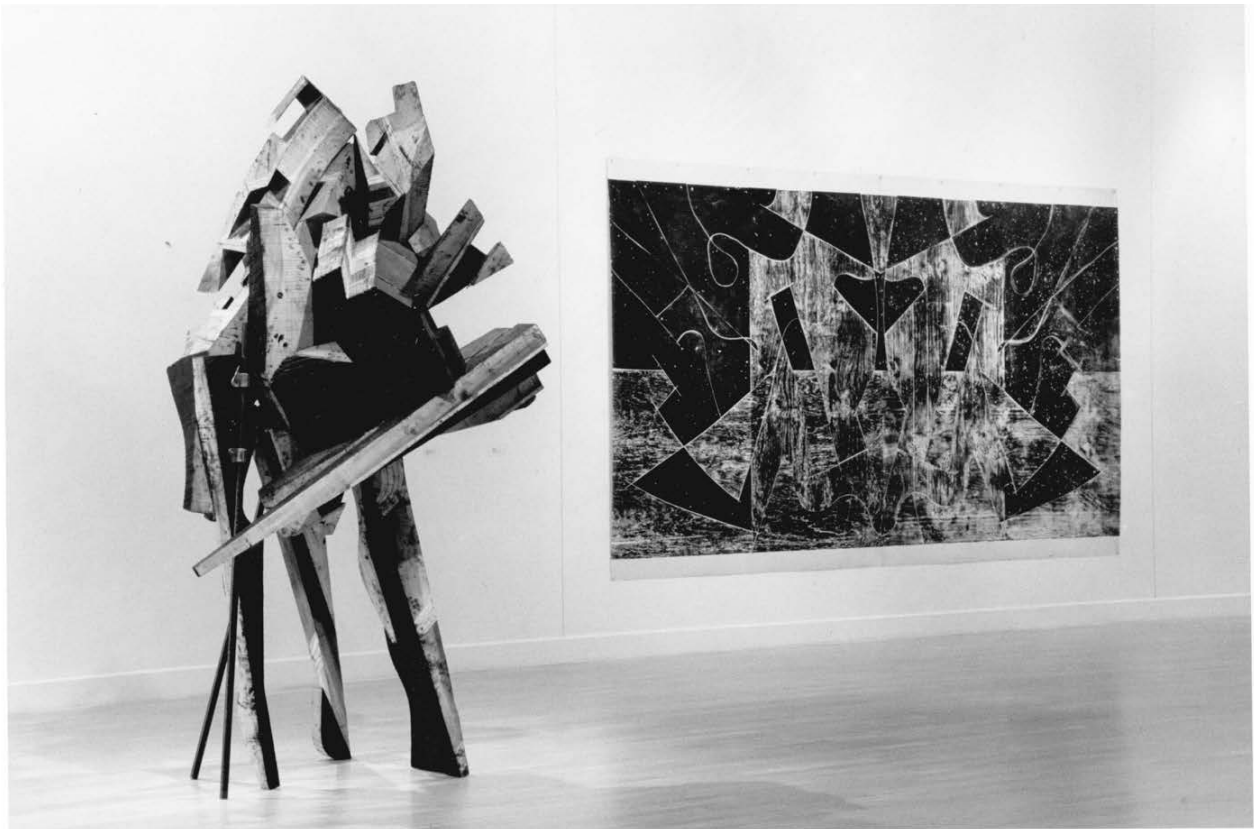
Core Samples, Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH, 2002

Core Samples, Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH, 2002

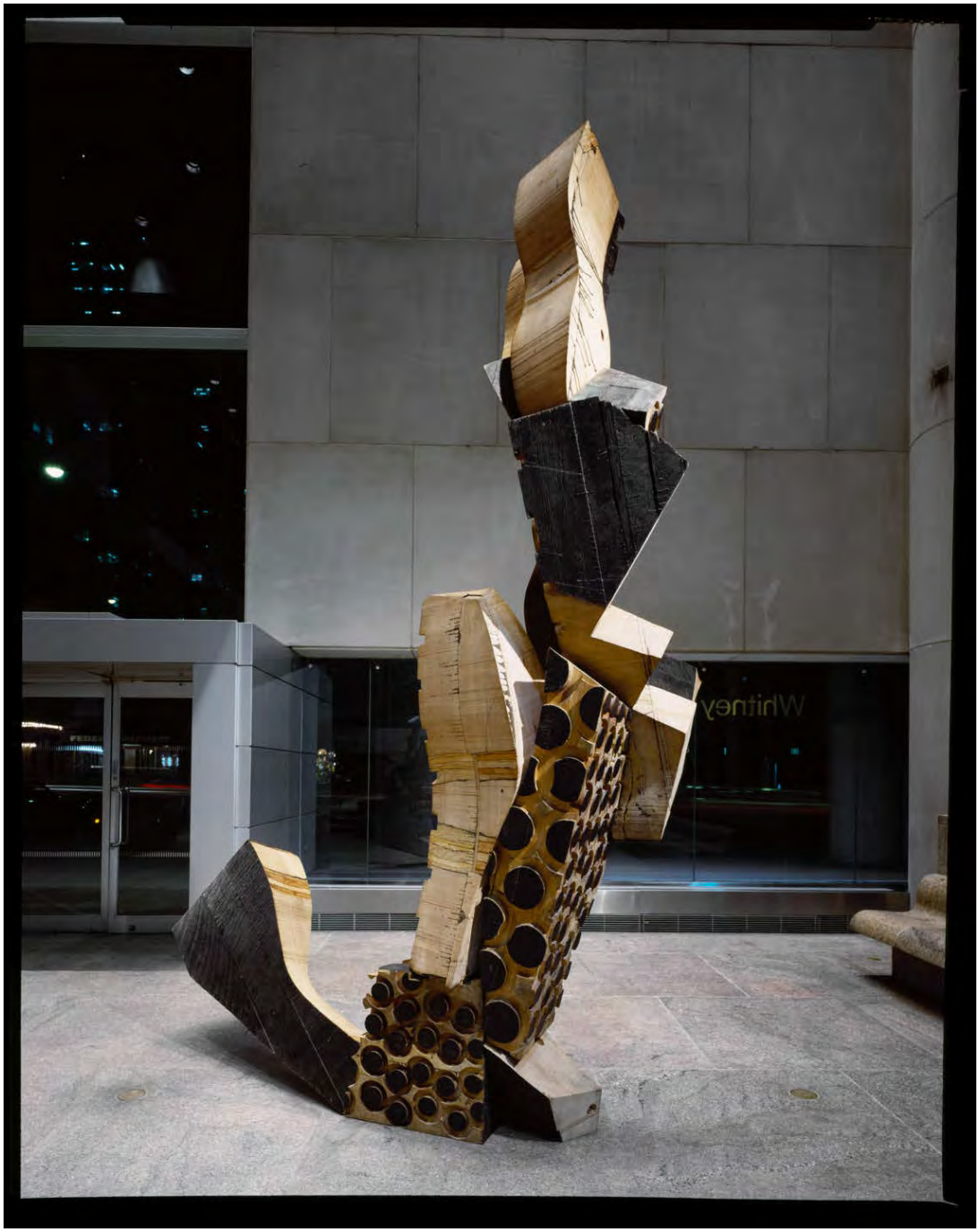
Core Samples, Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH, 2002

John Weber Gallery, New York, NY, 1995

News, Surprise, and Nostalgia, The Bertha and Karl Leubsdorf Art Gallery, Hunter College, New York, NY, 1995



Black Oil Works: Sculpture and Drawings 1991-92, Weatherspoon Art Gallery, University of North Carolina, Greensboro, NC, 1992



Out of Wood: Recent Sculpture, Whitney Museum of American Art at Philip Morris, New York, NY, 1989

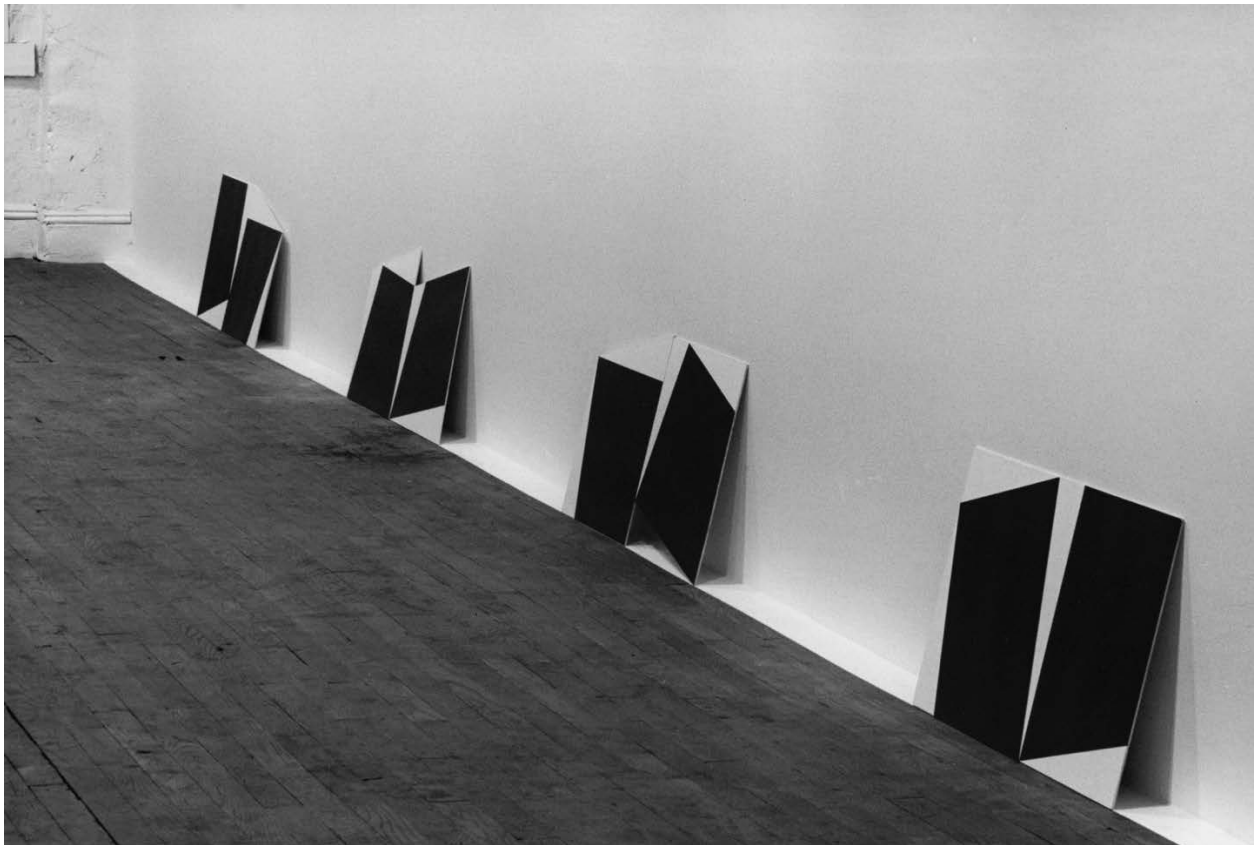
Innovations in Sculpture 1985-1988, curated by Ellen M. O'Donnell, Aldrich Museum, Ridgefield, CT, 1988

John Weber Gallery, New York, NY, 1985

The International Survey of Painting & Sculpture, Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, 1984

John Weber Gallery, New York, NY, 1983

John Weber Gallery, New York, NY, 1980



Mel Kendrick: Sculpture, Artists Space, New York, NY, 1974

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

‘Mel Kendrick: Seeing Things in Things’ Review: Process Over Product

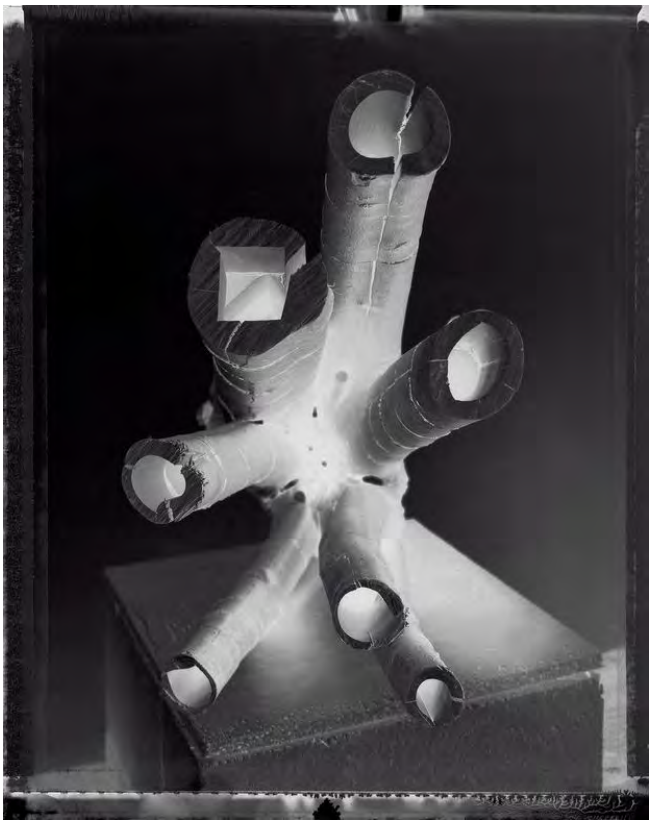
A jam-packed survey at the Addison Gallery of American Art showcases the sculptor’s distinctive application of Minimalist sensibilities to mostly natural materials.

By Lance Esplund

Here on the grounds of the Phillips Academy, while looking at the two large outdoor installations commissioned for “Mel Kendrick: Seeing Things in Things,” an artist accompanying me picked up and gave me a small, weathered tree branch. Shaped like a hand with outstretched fingers, its “palm” was dark and honey-colored and its “back” was bleached almost white. She was illustrating a point about the surprise and unpretentiousness of nature; and offering it as a palate cleanser to the nearly 90 abstract sculptures, most carved out of wood, we had just seen in Mr. Kendrick’s retrospective inside the Addison Gallery of American Art.

Born in Boston in 1949 and an Andover alumnus, Mr. Kendrick later studied with Minimalists Robert Morris and Tony Smith. Despite the fact that he works primarily in wood, a substance he evidently values for the pure, abstract beauty of its natural material, rather than metal, he’s often described as a Minimalist because of the reductiveness of his forms and his zealous embrace of process.

Process is a muse Mr. Kendrick doggedly pursues. And the evidence and range of his studio practice take center stage at the Addison. It oftentimes involves the meeting of a large tree stump with an unruly chainsaw; or the application of understated primary and secondary colors, ink, lamp black, graphite and plaster; or casting his carvings in amber-hued rubber; or photographing small, three-dimensional artworks in black-and-white and blowing up the negatives, like enormous X-rays; or making mural-size woodblock prints or cast paper “woodblock drawings,” which bridge printmaking and relief sculpture.



Many of his works, such as a series of “Black Oil” sculptures from 1991-92, on view here, each began as a wooden block, which was cut up into pieces, further altered and then reassembled, “like a jigsaw puzzle,” Mr. Kendrick explains in a 2019 interview, “but made by someone who doesn’t understand jigsaw puzzles, or who isn’t obeying the rules.”

It’s when he obeys something resembling rules, however, that Mr. Kendrick’s work is most clear and rewarding. It’s then that his Minimalist sensibility wins over his tendencies toward the frenetic, crowded and baroque—art as jigsaw puzzle gone purposefully awry.

Sometimes, Mr. Kendrick’s process is fruitfully palpable. Midway through this jam-packed exhibition of more than 100 objects—the first survey dedicated to Mr. Kendrick, who collaborated on the show with curator and Addison interim director Allison Kemmerer —is a row of seven untitled mahogany abstractions from 2007, all lined up diagonally like sentries across the gallery floor. Each sculpture, about 32 inches tall and tinted Japanese red, is divided into two halves (upper and lower). One part (either top or bottom) has seemingly been carved out of and removed from the other. The artworks’ cutout, negative sections have apparently, magically rematerialized as positive forms. They suggest sculptures on plinths, heads-and-busts or seated figures, but also nuts outside of their shells, or organs detached from their hosts. There’s spare, Constructivist logic and familial integrity at the heart of this sculptural idea—as well as sweet satisfaction in the recognition of the interrelatedness and transposition of top and bottom, inside and outside.

In other standout pieces, such as the crude “Black Walnut With Legs” (1986)—in which Mr. Kendrick pays homage to Constantin Brancusi’s first sculpture in wood, “Prodigal Son” (c. 1914-15), a blocky, nearly abstract figurative carving in the Philadelphia Museum of Art—primitive totem and figure are subsumed into pure, powerful abstract form. The sculpture’s “head,” “body” and “torso” interchange: “legs” become “neck”; “face” becomes “spine.” And in the blackened, equally totemic “Split Ebony” (1987), less than a foot tall, Mr. Kendrick beautifully contrasts and melds rippling curves and smooth polish with the

sharp, chipped and roughhewn. And in “Tiny Red and Blue” (1983), forms painted those colors and resembling stairs, waterfalls and plumage expand and contract with accordion-like ease.

Too often, however, process dominates—as if Mr. Kendrick is concerned more with how these things are made than with the finished products. “Big Tree” (1988), a chopped up, carved and reconfigured massive tree trunk, never transcends its humble origins. The 12-foot-tall by 5-foot-wide by 10-foot-long “Black Dots” (1989)—combining stacked blocks and octopus-like tendrils—is not a cohesive sculpture but a whiplashing stockpile of discordant articulations. And a lot of the wood works, comprising a body supported by legs or flying buttresses (such as pipe), imply gangly figures, potbelly stoves, space aliens, robotic models, giant hives and egg sacks—despite Mr. Kendrick’s disavowal of their blatantly anthropomorphic qualities. These “beings” can seem less like abstractions and more like obsessions with carved, surface razzmatazz and figurative contrapposto. Not much is gained when these artworks, like “Big Daddy Fun/Second Version” (1995), are then cast in rubber, propped up further with 2-by-4 blocks and displayed in pairs.

“Seeing Things in Things” establishes that Mr. Kendrick entertains a multitude of fertile, sculptural ideas. The artist who handed me that piece of tree branch was inspired by Mr. Kendrick’s “7 From 7” (2000)—an intriguing pairing of two much larger, hand-shaped wooden sculptures: one, fabricated; one, though altered, found. If not for this exhibition, she admittedly would not have seen the hand in the branch—the thing in the thing. Unfortunately, this show offers a few ideas too many and is so congested you can hardly navigate the galleries. It would benefit greatly from some judicious whittling.

—Mr. Esplund, the author of “The Art of Looking: How to Read Modern and Contemporary Art” (Basic Books), writes about art for the Journal.

The Boston Globe

ART REVIEW

Stepping into the material world of Mel Kendrick

By Murray Whyte Globe Staff, Updated May 13, 2021, 1 hour ago

A view of work by Mel Kendrick at the Addison Gallery of American Art. FRANK E. GRAHAM/COURTESY ADDISON GALLERY OF AMERICAN ART

ANDOVER — The title of Mel Kendrick's first-ever major career retrospective is "Seeing Things in Things," which sounds like a dodge because, at least partly, it is. Kendrick is noncommittal in that old-school Modernist way: For him, the work *means* nothing because it *is* nothing beyond, as the old saying goes, the thing itself. Kendrick, an alumnus of Phillips Academy, home to the splendid Addison Gallery of American Art, which mounted the show, might borrow from fellow Phillips artist alum Frank Stella: "What you see is what you see," Stella once said when asked about his work, the ultimate verbal shrug. It's an explanation by way of non sequitur.

Let's not mistake the lack of commitment to language for the same in the work. Just the opposite: Kendrick's oeuvre, almost all of it sculpture, is robust and imposing, alive with a zeal for making. The largest gallery here — "Seeing Things in Things" spans a half dozen rooms across the museum's entire second floor — is a communion with giants. The hollowed trunk of a monstrous maple tree perches on angular timbers, like an ancient, crippled beast on crutches. Another work, composed of swoops of textured heavy wood beams, rears up like a startled cobra.

I get the feeling that Kendrick would hate such analogies; the titles in this room run the oblique terrain of "Sculpture No. 2" and "Black Dots" (and there is plenty of "untitled" throughout). None of these pieces were made to be anything but what they are: wood and steel, whipped into shape by gesture and mark. Still, try *not* to see a pair of hobbled behemoths on the far side of the room, loping their broken bodies toward the door. I did my best, and I failed.

A view of Mel Kendrick's "Seeing Things in Things" at the Addison Gallery of American Art. FRANK E. GRAHAM/COURTESY ADDISON GALLERY OF AMERICAN ART

The show spans 1982 to more or less right now, which makes it suspect as a retrospective on strict terms. Kendrick graduated from Phillips in 1967 and went to New York's Hunter College in 1971 to do his master's in art with celebrated faculty members Robert Morris and Tony Smith.

In the early 1970s, what would become known as Minimalism had a strong hold on the art world. Smith, along with artists like Sol LeWitt and Donald Judd, was one of its pioneers nearly a decade earlier. Morris was an important figure in Minimalism's bleed into what would become Conceptual Art, encompassing forms such as performance, video, and photography. What followed was an intellectual bloating of what had been an aesthetic revolution, as the art world merged more tightly with academic theory and became so insulated that it separated from the larger world almost entirely.

It was in this milieu that Kendrick's career began in earnest, and to his apparent consternation. In an interview in the excellent catalog the Addison produced for the show, Kendrick recalls that he was flailing. "I was just doing everything that was in the air, I have to say," Kendrick tells his Phillips classmate and friend, the painter Carroll Dunham. A foray into video, Kendrick says, "was incredibly tedious."

Then, in 1982, a clean break. After some years of making sleek, Minimal sculptural works — heavily influenced, I'd think, by Smith's crisp geometric work — Kendrick pivoted to the more vivid and immediate practice that sustains him today. The short version is that Kendrick planned less and made more. Instead of working toward a conclusion, the work simply evolved.

I could call it liberating, but you can see for yourself. One standout piece, "Nemo," from 1983, is a spidery form of leggy black and white bolts of wood bundled into an uncomfortably small gallery — intentionally, I'm sure — that makes it feel like a caged animal. The artist may not like the implication, but: The work has personality. I don't want to project too much, but I imagine that making it was more than a little fun. Minus the frustrations, I'm sure, since it's a study in virtuosic joinery.

An array of works by Mel Kendrick. FRANK E. GRAHAM/COURTESY ADDISON GALLERY OF AMERICAN ART

Of course, in the '80s, art wasn't supposed to be fun. It was supposed to be deadly serious, made largely to fit into a greater theoretical frame. The tenor of those times would have made Kendrick something of an outsider. He's a material enthusiast, suspicious of doubletalk. His concern was, and is, immediacy, the task in front of him, solving formal problems step by step. Liberating as it might have been for him, imagine the impact on a viewer, drowning in artspeak. The works don't tell you what to think, and they give nothing away; that leaves your own visceral reaction to fill the ample space.

That being so, Kendrick will have to forgive us for seeing our own things in his things. One gallery sporting dozens of small works perched on steel pedestals evokes everything from Picasso to Brancusi to the totemic forms of ancient cultures. They're fantastically articulate, each one a perfect haiku of formal play. (At least one, a little red and blue guy from 1983, was distinctly rooster-like; Kendrick just calls it "Tiny Red and Blue," because of

Anyway. There's an undeniable lightness to confronting material riddles with no concern outside themselves, even with pieces so materially dense and heavy. You can all but observe Kendrick puzzling out various formal challenges he set for himself, in real time. "Black Trunk," which describes the piece just fine, has compelling presence, all smooth and dark and towering. A series of untitled works from 2007 is almost literally a puzzle, with Kendrick making three-dimensional explorations into each piece, fitting them with their own mirror forms and then slapping them with bright red paint, giving them a playful, festive feel.

Exploring is a good word for what Kendrick does, setting out for destinations unknown, each journey driven simply by the quest itself. Several works feel like questions with partial answers, taken to extremes. A handful feel like vivisection, with Kendrick flaying the bark off trees in careful whole sheaths, allowing him to display innards and skin side-by-side. They feel serious and intimate and violative, the artist probing uncomfortably deep.

But the lasting sense of "Seeing Things in Things" is an artist who seeks questions more than answers across materials and eras through the act of hands-on making. One jarring piece, "White Block/Spiral," from 2015, felt like a radical departure, its sleek white concrete skin, incised in radiant swirls, looking an awful lot like the 3-D-printed or algorithm-guided laser-cut work I've seen in recent years. There's the rub: Kendrick achieved its achingly contemporary sheen by age-old methods, hand-cutting every little arc and groove with a wire. Kendrick has always made things, and will always make things, because, really, what else is there?

MEL KENDRICK: SEEING THINGS IN THINGS

Through Oct. 3. The Addison Gallery of American Art, 180 Main St., Andover. 978-749-4000, addison.andover.edu

NEW YORK

To Do

Twenty-five things to see, hear, watch, and read

October 4-18

By Jerry Saltz

October 1, 2017

Art

2. See Mel Kendrick: Woodblock Drawings

That's art, not just process.

It's a hard truth that most of the artists who emerged from the late-1970s process-art scene never really evolved. A wonderful exception is Mel Kendrick, 68, who is still all process, all the time, but whose monumental gray-black jigsawlike renderings made into drawings come on like claps of optical thunder with lingering intellectual reverberations. —Jerry Saltz

David Nolan Gallery, 527 W. 29th St., through October 28.

The New Criterion

The Critic's Notebook

By James Panero

October 27, 2015

Mel Kendrick, *White Block/Spiral*, 2015. Precast concrete, 64 × 25 x 37 in.

Art: "Mel Kendrick: sub-stratum," at David Nolan Gallery (Through December 5): The process of how to make a sculpture has long been Mel Kendrick's product. In 2009, his black-and-white striped "Markers" enlivened New York's Madison Square Park and brought his ingenious sculptures, with one part carved from the other, to a wider audience. Now at David Nolan Gallery, his latest work uses foam blocks, hot wires, and concrete molds to find increasingly supple forms in his tension between positive and negative, figure and base.

Wall Street International

Mel Kendrick. Water Drawings

16 Jan — 1 Mar 2014 at the David Nolan Gallery in New York, United States

20 JANUARY 2014

Mel Kendrick, Red Wall #6, 2013, mahogany and red japan color, 29 x 40 x 8 in, 73.7 x 101.6 x 20.3 cm

David Nolan Gallery is excited to present a new body of work by Mel Kendrick. On view from January 16 through March 1, the exhibition will include 20 works on paper.

The art critic, Meghan Dailey, has recently written about these new works:

Kendrick describes and often makes his works on paper in sculptural terms. For the past year, he's been pursuing what he calls "Water Drawings," a series of cast-paper drawings comprising two 40-by-60-inch sheets created at Dieu Donné papermaking workshop in New York. A black pigment-coated mold is pressed into a soft mass of wet pulp, and under the force of the press the pigment spreads into the paper and binds with it.

The resulting sheets are weighty-looking reliefs, with deep imprints and overlapping forms that resemble topographical views, like lakes or islands seen from an airplane window. There's also a kind of transparency to the overlapping forms, a sense of looking through one thing and connecting to another. In the act of looking, "what's on top becomes the bottom. There's a constant exchange that

gives them an internal logic," says Kendrick. "When I make sculpture, it's the same thing."

Kendrick's first solo show at Artists Space was in 1974 and since then, he has shown in close to 50 solo shows and numerous group shows. In 1984, his work was included in the "The International Survey of Painting and Sculpture" at the Museum of Modern Art and the following year in the Whitney Biennial. In 2008, he was awarded the Francis J. Greenburger Award and other honors include the Academy Award for Art from the American Academy of Arts.

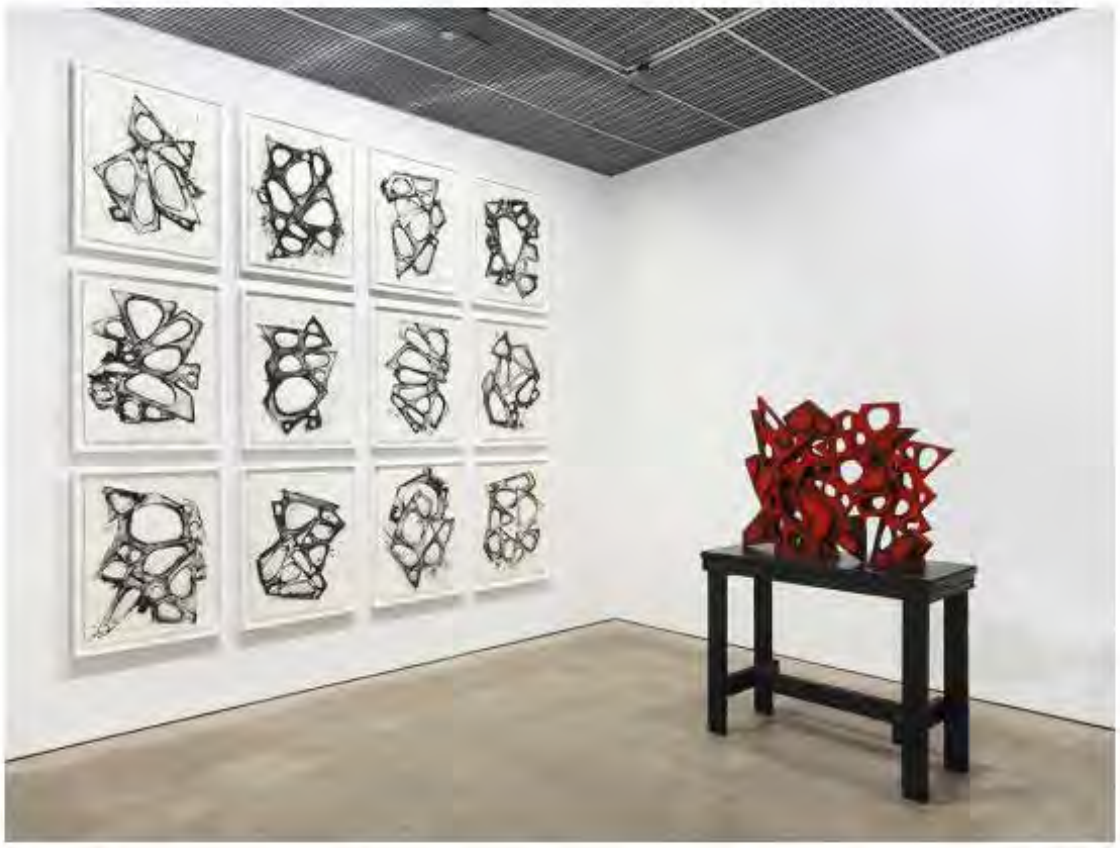
Kendrick's work can be found in numerous permanent collections including; the Art Institute of Chicago, the Brooklyn Museum, the Dallas Museum of Art, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, the National Gallery of Art, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Storm King Art Center, the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Yale University Art Gallery.

Kendrick lives and works in New York City.

Art in America

The Lookout

February 2014



A vibrant show of Mel Kendrick's recent works, "Water Drawings" features an abstract wood sculpture centered around a process of deconstruction and reconstruction. The stained red mahogany *Red Wall #6* (2013), an atypical example constructed with facets of organic shapes, corresponds to the 20 large cast pulp-paper works (up to 80-by-60 inches) that are the highlights of the show. These richly textured, unique pieces featuring interlocking rounded shapes were created by pressing pigment-stained rubber molds into the paper paste and allowing them to dry. Retaining a sense of fluidity, these elegant works are more like relief sculptures than "drawings."

THE BROOKLYN RAIL
CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE
March 2011

First Coring, 1995, courtesy David Nolan Gallery

MEL KENDRICK with Ben La Rocco
by Ben La Rocco

On the occasion of Mel Kendrick's upcoming exhibitions Jacks (March 25 – April 30, 2011) at Mary Boone Gallery and Works from 1995 to Now at David Nolan Gallery (March 17 – April 30, 2011), Brooklyn Rail Art Editor Ben La Rocco visited the artist in his Lower East Side studio to discuss his life and work.

Ben La Rocco (Rail): There's a rumor going around about you and your work, that you started as a painter. Is that true?
Mel Kendrick: No, untrue. Photographer, yes. Never painting.

Rail: So it was sculpture from undergrad on?
Kendrick: More or less. Trinity College wasn't exactly an art school. There were some great teachers there. To me, making sculpture has always been learning how to do it while I do it. I wouldn't know what to do with a blank canvas, really. Usually when I did try it I would be putting on broken glass and plywood and whatever, I'd be doing it in a physical way, trying to kind of circumvent the tradition.

Rail: When did you get to New York?
Kendrick: I got to New York in the fall of 1971.

Rail: You went straight to Hunter?
Kendrick: Yeah. I was pretty focused. I was trying to figure out a way to get to New York, but at 23 I didn't really have the guts to come in and call myself an artist and just set up shop. I needed that structure and there were these guys teaching there who really interested me.

Rail: Tony Smith and Bob Morris had very different teaching styles, I understand. I was wondering what you got from each of them.
Kendrick: I don't know how much of it was the time, the early '70s. One thing they had in common was they never talked about what was in front of us. Everything spun off into another subject. Morris was much more interested in performance, subversive interventions in public spaces. In a way, Tony couldn't have been less interested in the actual work of the students, but it didn't feel bad, kind of like if you're in a room with these things, and the ideas start moving, that's the way to go. There was a lot happening then. In the spring of 1973, I got the position as an assistant to Dorothea Rockburne and worked on her installations in Europe that summer, including Documenta. I had my first show at Artists Space in 1974 when I was 24. In 1976 I had a piece at P.S. 1, but it was quite a while before I showed at a commercial gallery. Back then, for younger artists, everything was alternative spaces.

Rail: There's an interesting exterior/interior relationship that I see in your work since the millennium. Did that evolve at that time? Certainly I see it in the "Core Samples," which you'll be showing at David Nolan.
Kendrick: The work you are referring to really began in the 1980s in my show in John Weber's Gallery on Greene Street after he moved from 420 West Broadway in 1983. Prior to that, I had been working on more linear sculptures in wood that had a clear relationship to architecture. In 1983, I showed much smaller work on steel bases. It was totally antithetical to what was going on at the time, but I had become interested in these smaller spaces and more intricate relationships that you could project yourself into as opposed to dealing with the whole space and its architecture. And, back to your question, they did involve cutting and shifting parts in various blocks of wood that could be considered a precursor to the "Core Samples." It was much more obscured then because I was doing many more things. But there was always a notion of a skin, cutting through the skin and pulling parts out. It's just that I didn't clarify what I was doing to the degree that I do now. I didn't see one thing coming from something else.

Rail: You were working with geometry then, as well.
Kendrick: Geometry comes from tools, really. Zigzags, curves, and loops are ways of drawing in wood. I couldn't work that way without there being some feeling of geometry, or maybe simply addition and subtraction, that is to say removing parts and putting them somewhere else. Actually I'm finding more freedom with the materials I'm using now. But wood was great. I used a whole range of wood, but you can never really put it back together again. Once you cut it, it's cut. The grain shifted. That's just part of the process. It's very different than with metal, where you can actually weld it, hide it, seal it.

Rail: You talked about that before, the tools dictating scale in work. Now you're talking about the tools dictating the mark, like a kind of utilitarian philosophy at work.
Kendrick: I like very much the idea of using what you have at hand with its inherent limitations. It's not like I have to run out and get something new. There's a way of finding it in myself. I use paint as another material, as a signifier. It was kind of like a skin that I put on, like the bark in the later pieces, something that's there that indicates the inside and outside and how it's been pulled apart.

Rail: There was a particular kind of paint that you used for the "Red Blocks" series you showed at David Nolan in 2007.
Kendrick: Japan Color. That's pretty straightforward.

Rail: So the "Core Samples" came just prior to that work?
Kendrick: Yes. In about '95 I moved into this studio on 9th Street and had a great open space with a large freight elevator and I started hauling in these logs and hollow trees that I had found in a tree dump in New Jersey. It was sort of a reclamation project. They would have been turned into mulch. I worked with the hollow trees, repairing them, opening up the insides so you could see what was going on. Mending plates and threaded steel rods held them together. This was a very different way of working. It led to the "Core Samples" and a piece I did in the Sitelines: Art on Main show Adam Weinberg put together at the Addison. They gave me access to a crate-making factory in Lawrence that was going out of business. I took a large tree trunk I found at their tree dump and sliced it like a loaf of bread. Then reconstructed a second tree, more or less, from the centers I cut out of each slice. The hollow trunk was also rebuilt.

Rail: You have used the word "analytical" to describe your working process. You're always trying to get to the root of what a substance does, the nature of things.
Kendrick: Yeah, something that also makes something else, like the shadow, the echo, the doppelganger. It's very easy to talk about what I'm doing in terms of process and analysis, yet if there isn't some gut connection, analysis alone is not very interesting. And this is not science.

Rail: Yeah, that's something that always struck me about your work. It does have very distinct formal qualities, but there's always the sense that you're certainly not a formalist, that you're not interested in design for its own sake.
Kendrick: I would agree with that. I'm doing something else. I think I've disappointed people by not talking about ecology and the landscape. There was the irony of working with big trees in a New York studio. There's something about the rectilinear spaces of the city that made it much more interesting to me. The pieces I am showing at David Nolan date from that period in the '90s. There is also a lot about standing, propping, correcting. They feel like they've been through something.

Rail: That work, certainly the "Core Samples," seems most to allude to the body. Other work does in terms of scale, and you could interpret some of that as having a representational dimension. But that just seems to come from the natural form you're working with. In other words, it's not something you ever seem to have put there. It seems to be there already.
Kendrick: It's not something I'm putting there. I want to stay in the realm of ambiguity.

Rail: The poet Richard Hell once said that he felt whatever room he was in, he always wanted to walk out of it. What you're saying reminds me of that.
Kendrick: I get that. You don't want to define everything by what it's not.

Rail: Well maybe we can get into the additional layer of meaning in your work by talking about the concrete sculpture. You are preparing for your exhibition at Mary Boone in March. You call them "Jacks." You have spoken about materials being the size and scale they should be. Are you saying that concrete wants to be a certain scale?
Kendrick: [Laughs.] No, I want it to be a certain scale. It is not a delicate material. I feel that there's a crudity, even though I'm sort of working against it, to the concrete that demands an industrial scale. The weight, the molds, the material doesn't make sense with small intimate objects. But then the pieces are 11 feet tall, not that large in terms of buildings or even public sculpture. The height feels right to me. The bases are rectangular blocks 63 inches high, around eye level. They create almost a water level in the gallery, a plane separating what's above from what's below. When I started this process I was thinking about the construct of sculpture. The blocks are rectilinear bases. Unlike the pieces in Madison Square Park, the top is loose and could be placed in different ways. The block comes from its base, but also its generation chamber. When I made the first block, I was a little disappointed. It didn't seem so large. The addition of the second part changed all that because it is above eye level and you have to look up. And it is the top parts together that feel massive.

Rail: How does architecture figure into your thinking?
Kendrick: I was strongly influenced by the black-and-white marble in Italian Gothic churches like the (Duomo) of Siena. The stripes work with the architecture or almost obliviously to it. I like the concept of horror vacui, the need for all-over decoration. It's incredibly satisfying though often considered unrefined. There is something geological to this type of layering, like sedimentation. The layers are extremely heavy.

Rail: You mentioned the Madison Square Park series, called "Markers." Was that your first public work in concrete?
Kendrick: Yeah, in 2009. They varied slightly in height. Those were the first five large pieces I did. In each one I attempted to do something quite different internally. When I look at them now, I see them as being unique pieces, but when I put them in a line, they became unified by the black-and-white striations. It was a sort of attention-grabbing camouflage.

Rail: Which came first, the concept of markers, or the stripes themselves?
Kendrick: "Markers" was a name that came after I was seeing the physical effect of these pieces. My notion about monuments or towers or a way of putting things in nature that wasn't necessarily "sculpture."

Rail: It seems like a kind of visual puzzle. I feel these two parts fit together. I don't know how.
Kendrick: Yeah, the idea of puzzles is a funny one. It's kind of interesting how many people never see the relationship of the top and bottom. You may find that hard to believe. They feel the relationship but there's no notion that the top came from the bottom.

Rail: What sort of responses did you find?

Kendrick: Well I found that gratifying. I liked that. I've got my own systems at work, my own reasons for doing things, and if somebody responds to it and doesn't understand all those reasons, that's fine. There's a simultaneity at work in how you perceive information, how one thing informs the other. I think I like the possibility that any art or sculpture is not a temporal reading, it's something you can be around, see out the corner of your eye, respond to on all these different levels. Not like something you can describe in a sentence. If you can describe what's going on in a sculpture in a sentence, then there's practically no visual component to it. There's a concept that's always interested me and I'll just run it by you: It's the reading of analog versus digital. What interests me about analog, is that it's basically mechanical. You can take something apart and understand the logical physical relationships of the parts—

Rail: —analog was the recording method we used before we had digital.
Kendrick: Yeah, analog just translated the vibrations directly into magnetic tape, which could then be read by other magnets and turned back into vibrations. Digital is a code that must be interpreted because everything has been broken down into on/off switches, millions of them. There is no physical relationship between cause and effect. I was thinking about something much more basic, though. The main analog object in our lives is the clock, or, more specifically, the clock dial. If you are giving a lecture and there is a clock in the back of the room—if it's a digital clock, you have to stop speaking to read it before you can go on. The numbers on the digital clock are linear and must be read like a sentence. If you're saying a sentence, you're using the same part of the brain you use to speak. If it's an analog clock, you don't have to stop talking. You register the time not by the numbers but by the relationship of the hands on the dial, independent from the flow of words. The analog clock is something you read with a different part of your brain. I don't know where this gets me, but I like that idea, that you can be seeing and understanding two things at the same time, it's a simultaneous experience, a simultaneous perception.

Rail: Do you think that's analogous to the way art should be experienced?
Kendrick: That would be like understanding a painting without reading the paragraph on the wall [laughs], but specifically I was just thinking about how I always have two parallel things going on at the same time in my work. I want to identify for myself, anyway, that there are different ways of perceiving information, and that there is potentially a specific kind of language in objects.

Rail: The filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky talks about the reason artists make art; he says artists make art firstly to understand something for themselves.
Kendrick: Without a doubt. And I think that's the challenge when you get out of the modernist concept, that each movement is going to break the other and turn it upside down, this great progression of art from Cubism on. So yeah, I think it is about learning something for yourself, or at least entertaining yourself, which are not mutually exclusive ideas.

Rail: This seems like a particular dilemma for abstraction because abstraction was so co-opted by those ideas of progress you're talking about. I think it's often interpreted through that lens. You're saying that you're trying to create more space, another perspective.
Kendrick: For a long time, we've been talking about the things themselves. The minimalists introduced the concept of "concrete art," real things, real materials, real relationships; it doesn't relate to anything else except what you're looking at. Yet if I meet someone on the train, it's always easier to say "I make abstract art," but I always hate it and that's also why we try to get away from "sculpture" and say, "I make objects, I make interesting things." It's funny that painting hasn't had that issue. But identifying sculpture, or any art, as abstract is somehow limiting.

Rail: It's interesting because lately I've been thinking about sculpture as having this potential that painting doesn't really have, to reclaim objects in the world, reconsider them.
Kendrick: Reconsider is a very good word. It's what we're talking about: trying to get around the idea that you know something. But do you really know it? Is there another way of knowing it? We are in the physical world, and it gets more interesting to me, as things get more digital, to deal with this physicality. The concrete is not just solid but it also has rebar and the attachments you need for heavy machinery to make this thing work to move it. In that way, it's situated in the real world. Someone asked me about moving these pieces: How do you get these things somewhere? Well, that's easy, you just get a flat-bed truck, they're all over the place, and take it wherever you want. Concrete is heavy material, far easier to get 15,000 pounds of concrete somewhere than a painting. Ways of handling it exist. And it's not like the bubble-wrapped world of climate-controlled art shipping.

Rail: Along those lines, you've talked about the experience of going into a foundry to work with the craftsmen there to gradually get your vision to play itself out in the concrete. People working in a process that normally has little to do with art would then help you deal with problems in the creative process. This strikes me as another kind of moving outward into this world that's beyond classical sculpture or art, finding out how the two can mesh.
Kendrick: That's what I find really exciting, the people that I'm working with. There's a tremendous learning curve and these are all unique pieces. You can get almost to the end and someone screws up and you have to start from scratch, but that's the nature of it. The "Jacks" have four layers to the top and four to the bottom. I started out with the idea of stacking the separate layers after they were formed and cast. But instead, we cast each layer directly on top of the previous layer. This is a system we developed together. When I cut apart the block of foam, I am making the mold for the top section, and what is removed becomes the mold for the bottom section. This is an added step from working directly with wood. It's hard to keep track of what's going on because you really are working backwards. The concrete itself is incredible: way harder than what we are used to in sidewalks and buildings. But still, taking anything with that mass to a fine point is risky, and in some cases I just have to accept what the material does.

Rail: What's crazy about the process of this work is that there is really no way to describe it! [Laughs.]
Kendrick: No. I think we tried to describe it in the "Markers" catalogue. And I think people's eyes just glazed over. There is no way.

Rail: What did David Kucera, the concrete fabricator, say to you? You take the simplest part of the process of casting and make it as hard as it possibly can be?
Kendrick: Yeah, I think he said that. The backwards way, the obsessive way. Basically, you never wind up doing what you think you're going to do. You know so much in the beginning and you know so little later on. Terry Winters once said that when you talk about your old work, all you really wind up talking about is the logical inevitability of what you're doing now. There's still hopefully some magic in the contradiction of messing with expectations, seeing something that you wouldn't expect to see. Understanding something you didn't understand. Tony Smith was good for that. Talking to him expanded the whole prospect of art-making. Maybe it was the associations he made, whether it was James Joyce or Tennessee Williams, it brought everything into a bigger world that I'd really like art to inhabit on a day-to-day basis.

Rail: That's the answer to my question about your early days, in New York in the '70s: you're interested in the future and in the current state of art.
Kendrick: Absolutely. We've had like three or four art worlds since then.

Rail: You've been here in the city for all of them!

Kendrick: Yeah, and some were really good for me, some I just worked on the sidelines and wasn't involved. But that's fine. That's part of the difficulty for everybody coming out of art school recently, and showing right away. If you're going to do it, you have to keep on doing it without all that. Basically, any attention in art is a mini-Renaissance. Support breeds work. If artists can make work, and sell it, that's fantastic. The motivators are always different. You can spend your life never finishing work. But then when you show, it's easy to focus. Working without that, you have to really decide what's important.

Rail: A lot of people stop.
Kendrick: Yeah, I don't know why I'm still doing this. [Laughs.] If I think too much about that, it makes no sense whatsoever.

Rail: That's actually one of things I like most about art.
Kendrick: That it makes no sense? You know what I would say? The world doesn't make sense and art makes more sense now than ever. I grew up in a conservative background. All the professions, the things that you were maybe meant to do, meant to be, whether it was working for a corporation or, whatever, the business world—all those things are shot full of holes. And the actual fact of making something in this culture in this time is incredibly valuable. I never expected that. There was always that feeling that you were kind of skipping out on things, being an artist, but now I'm surrounded by people who skim money from corporate deals and they're not providing anything, anywhere. Now, making things makes a lot of sense. I don't know if I explained that right but it is an interesting shift.

Rail: What you're saying makes total sense to me, but I'm not sure I'm the best judge! [Laughter.]
Kendrick: Yeah, well you know. Somehow it gets clearer and clearer.

MADISON SQUARE PARK CONSERVANCY

Mel Kendrick: *Markers*

Photos by James Ewing

The Madison Park Conservancy's Madison Sq. Art program is pleased to present *Markers,* a group of five new cast concrete sculptures by Mel Kendrick. They will be installed on the central axis of the central Oval Lawn of historic Madison Square Park.

MARKERS

The five new pieces that make up the *Markers* installation in Madison Square Park are at once radically new and quintessentially Kendrick; on the one hand a bold departure from the artist's characteristic use of wood as his primary medium, on the other hand a natural evolution of the formal motifs and self-evident process that have become synonymous with his work. Since the mid-1970s, Kendrick has developed a

reputation for sculptures born of the play between addition and subtraction, destruction and creation. In Kendrick's hands, blocks of raw wood are sliced and gutted, their interiors ingeniously reconfigured and reconstituted atop the remnant shell of the wood block from which they originated.

In *Markers*, Kendrick applies the same aesthetic and procedural methods to cast concrete. The black and white concrete is poured in layers, a new process and new material for the artist. For Kendrick, ever the process-oriented sculptor, these striations and the rippling surfaces for contain the fossil memory of the actions taken over time. The sources for the *Markers* works vary widely, from the black and white marble found in Gothic Italian Cathedrals such as Siena, to the simplest methods of marking: placing one object on top of another. Their location in Madison Square Park also references the numerous monuments installed throughout New York City park system.

About Mel Kendrick

Mel Kendrick was born in Boston, MA and lives and works in New York City. He received a B.A. from Trinity College in Hartford, CT and a M.A. from Hunter College in New York. For more than three decades Kendrick has been producing a body of work that reveals an obsessive appreciation for the intricacies of his material and highlights an engaged and laborious creative process. The works that result constitute a philosophical, rather than formal abstraction; deftly deploying a variety of techniques, forms and color treatments to address themes of wounding and repair, interiority and externality, positive and negative volume.

Kendrick has exhibited extensively and to great acclaim since the mid-1970s at institutions including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York and the Brooklyn Museum, New York. His work is included in many significant public collections, including those of the Art Institute of Chicago; the Brooklyn Museum; the Metropolitan Museum of Art; the Museum of Modern Art; the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; and the Whitney Museum of American Art. He has been the recipient of numerous awards, most recently the Francis J. Greenburger Award and the Academy Award for Art from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He is represented by David Nolan Gallery.

Major Support for Mad. Sq. Art is provided by Founding Partners Agnes Gund and Anonymous. Substantial support is provided by Ronald A. Pizzuti, Toby Devan Lewis and the Henry Luce Foundation. Support for *Markers* is generously provided by David Nolan Gallery, Gail Monaghan, Francis Williams, Raymond Learsy, Wynn Kramarsky and Ted Poretz. This project is supported in part with public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs. Mad. Sq. Art is made possible by the leadership and generosity of the many friends of the Madison Square Park Conservancy.

Art

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OF A DIFFERENT STRIPE

Mel Kendrick's clustered black-and-white cast-concrete sculptures in Madison Square Park look like they're on the march up Manhattan Island. Each is about the size of a Mini Cooper stood on end, and all of them radiate a strangely formal uncanniness They're lumpen warlocks or Cubist chain-gang golems-what Rodin's Burghers of Calais might resemble if they were put through a band saw, turned into *Alice in Wonderland* chessmen, and allowed to wander (on view through December 31). JERRY SALTZ

ARTnews

Mel Kendrick, *Untitled*, 2007,
wood and Japan color, 31⅞" x 12⅝" x 12⅛".
David Nolan.

Mel Kendrick at David Nolan Gallery
By Phoebe Hoban
January 2008

With their low center of gravity, rough hewn chunkiness, and warm red tone, Mel Kendrick's seven "Red Blocks" are endearingly low-tech. These chiseled cubic sculptures resemble three-dimensional jigsaw puzzles or an interpretation of lawn dwarfs in the style of Picasso. Arranged in a near semicircle along the walls of the main gallery, the sculptures had an odd anthropomorphic quality, like a tribe of wooden dolls. (The back room contained a roguish leader of the pack; nearly twice as tall as its rosy brethren and painted Astroturf green, it looks like a deconstructed frog.)

But despite their apparent simplicity, these mahogany building blocks are an elegant exercise in interior/exterior, positive/negative space. Kendrick has essentially recycled each block by using everything he carved out of it to embellish its surface. For instance, a cone sitting like a dunce cap on one sculpture has been cut out of the block itself, which retains the cone-shaped hole as part of its structure.

For some time, Kendrick has been employing a variation of this trope- what he has called "dynamic energy generated from within the sculpture." It's an idea he literalizes by leaving traces of his process: pencil lines, chalk marks, and gouges. There is something innately satisfying about the way not a splinter of wood is wasted. It's as if the material has given birth to its own artwork, making one reconsider both the organic nature of the material and the creative process itself. Which is not to say that the work is deadly serious; it retains an air of whimsy. Call it art that is holistic- in the truest sense of the word.

sculpture

Extended Time By Jonathan Goodman
in Sculpture Magazine, Feb 2007

The sculptures of Mel Kendrick are remarkably various: they twist and rotate and pulse as engaging experiments in positive and negative space. From the start of his career, in the early 1970's, Kendrick has taken a strong interest in piecing together parts and planes of wood, sometimes painting his work to accentuate the relationship between the extant elements building the composition and the empty spaces their cutting out left behind. Greatly taken with the process of making things, in the hopes of demonstrating not only the attractiveness of form but also the philosophical understanding of creating shapes and parallel openings, he cuts and builds marvelously intricate works that reflect on the consequences of their own being and building. As he has said, "I became interested in the idea that an object could define itself, be completely self-referential." The innate self-containment of the works is enlarged and explored as an illustration of the imagination. Kendrick comments, "My pieces are self-referential; they are models of the thought process. I arrived at this way of working when I stopped drawing altogether. I wanted my decision making very much evident in the pieces themselves."

When Kendrick began making his self-sufficient art, Minimalism was the dominant language on the scene. He moved to New York in the early 1970s, immediately after graduating from Trinity College in Connecticut, and lived with fellow classmates – the painter Carroll Dunham and the architect Peter Wheelwright – in a loft on Thomas Street (Kendrick says that fixing up the loft was the first time he had really built anything). The self-limited, yet also expansive discourse of his sculpture quickly became both a tested method for making art and an inquiry into the limits and boundaries of the imagination. Kendrick claims that his tastes are eclectic, but he enjoys the process of creating above all else. He asserts, "I have always liked the early work of Don Judd when he was still exploring ways of making things and before he refined his vocabulary."

Kendrick's emphasis is on process: there is a roughness to his wood pieces that emphasizes his connection with other artists such as Robert Smithson and Eva Hesse skilled in the use of materials. Interested in the *making* of things, Kendrick presents his work with a nod to Minimalist simplicity and Arte Povera's penchant for material truthfulness- his is a language meant to emphasize the nature of

sculpture itself. As Kendrick says, "Abstracting is in essence an interpretive activity that is in response to the outside subject." Much of his coherence as a sculptor is based on this recognition, namely, that despite the self-directed limitations of his art, a concern with the exterior world comes through, so that references are not always ends in themselves. In fact, the self-defining nature of Kendrick's idiom, the creative process becomes a vehicle for thought, a consideration for the imagination in its own terms. In that sense, he remains close to the Modernist decision to concentrate on the dimensions, physical and philosophical, of the medium itself. While Kendrick says that Cubism is not relevant to his work, he nonetheless employs the forms and innate descriptive properties of wood – its ability to register decision-making as part of the artistic process – as a way of commenting on his methodology, in a fashion emphasizing the separate planes of the composition. The process is essentially open: "If I make a 'mistake', I correct it or adjust to it, and that activity becomes part of the piece. In drawing, for example, an erased line never really disappears." Because Kendrick works so regularly with wood, he is sharply aware of its nature, not as a craftsman, but as an artist: "I am not in love with wood, but it has distinctive attributes. A cut made in wood is irreversible. Mistake and repair are part of the process. I am not a woodworker; I use a tremendous amount of glue, mending plates, and threaded rods to reconstruct what I have pulled apart. I like the limitations of a material and the adaptations needed to compensate."

Yet, despite the value that Kendrick places on process, he creates finished pieces capable of holding their own within the space of a room. Unlike so many artists today, who often appear to have forgotten the element of skill in the creation of three-dimensional work, Kendrick's technical abilities compel viewers to see the sculptures as made things, in which an overall gestalt competes with the worked-on aspect of the wood. This big-picture view, alongside the many small decisions that went into the making, makes his art distinctive, demonstrative of a sensibility and aesthetic that incorporate large and small technologies.

The question may be asked whether Kendrick's art is tied to traditional concerns or whether it reflects current thinking in sculpture, which has moved away from the self-contained formal object toward a statement of identity or politics best said in large, inclusive environments or installations. While Kendrick rejects the description of his sculptures as formal, preferring the adjective "philosophical" as illuminating the nature of his abstract explorations of form, his work inevitably acts as a corrective for an image-making culture whose casual informality has damaged its capacity for thinking through an idea. One hesitates to generalize, especially given the highly pluralist circumstances of art today, but the artists in the recent Whitney Biennial, for example, seem to have moved away from formal properties toward a more general, more often vaguely constructed vernacular. By contrast, Kendrick's emphasis on tightly constructed planes, or on pieces in which the history of their making is evident on the surface, enables him to connect to art traditions

that amply contextualize his efforts, even when they seem obligatorily self-constructed. Additionally, Kendrick does not turn his back on the details. He says of color, "Color was initially a system of coding, a marker that identified my progress. It is the sculpture within the sculpture." And he identifies scale as an interesting issue, saying that "size does not indicate content; in fact, increased scale is often used to mask content or lack thereof." Indeed, many of his sculptures are diminutive by current standards, although the completeness of their language gives them a monumentality that can be striking.

Today, in an age of spectacle, emphasis is given to the surface, both literally and metaphorically. In contrast, Kendrick, in his serial experiment Orange Blocks (2004), takes the cut-away interior of a cube of wood and displays it as part of the sculpture, placing it on top of the open shell. The result is a fine-tuned complexity, in which the inside is displayed as an external, but also integral, part of the work. These pieces are fully in keeping with Kendrick's penchant for displaying the decisions behind creation. Sitting on the ground, they convey a basic force in which the hollowed cube functions not only as part of the sculpture, but also as the pedestal on which its interior rests. The sculptures display a nearly primitive sense of form. There is a rawness to much of Kendrick's work that could conceivably link the artist to the practice of the artisan. At the same time, of course, the pieces are driven by intellectual choices, so that their expression is mediated by an awareness of basic, innate sculptural qualities: positive and negative space, the use of color, the play of scale. Kendrick uses the inside of a tree or wooden cube to publicly comment on its interiority – the sculptures become metaphors for internal states whose creative energies are strong enough to stand up to the pressures of the external world. In *6 Cuts* (2006), for example, bark-free circles of wood pierced with holes rise up from several sections of a tree with its exterior intact: the contrast between the two states is powerful. As a small tower, *6 Cuts* is a sophisticated, imagistically meaningful exercise in forms that balance each other, their subtle modulations building platforms that both occupy and diffuse space.

Kendrick's proclivity for a vigorous dualism of effort and effect makes his art exceptionally dynamic. One can see how the manual labor affecting the surface and core of the wood conveys the deliberations of an active mind. While his work is about process, chance doesn't seem to play much of a role. Instead, he makes his mind up to pattern and build in a controlled fashion, the underlying idea fiving his work its depth and energy. The stacking of related parts results in a subtle shift in the perception of the sculpture, so that small changes in volume suddenly become very important to the presentation.

The juxtaposition of the wood's core with the exterior form from which it was extracted allows for extended contemplation of the construction's slow coming-into-being, inciting pleasure and an abstract interest in how the works have been made. By addressing these issues, Kendrick suggests a metaphor for creativity, in which the privately considered becomes publicly available. He tends to reverse

categories, the inner becoming the outer and vice versa, undermining our subjective assumptions about such states.

It is possible to see Kendrick's focus on, as he calls it, "attacking the wood" in *Amphora A* (2002). A large piece (102 inches high) propped up by wooden wedges and metal struts, the tree has been cut into slices and painted black, with thin planks separating one slice from another. Roughly the shape of an amphora, the sculpture also resembles a woman's torso, the sensual curves of which can be followed by an attentive eve. In a very big sculpture such as Amphora A, it is hard to control the volumetric overview of the work, yet Kendrick has created boundaries and measured elements by cutting the wood into roughly equal slabs. The pieces inserted into the edges left by the cuts afford a view through the cracks to the other side of the piece, creating a feeling of lightness and transparency despite the volume and color of the sculpture. Kendrick, who has worked effectively within the constraint of very small objects, has here created a remarkably graceful monumental work in which elaborately curved outlines are joined to a grandly volumetric mass. The combination of grace and weight creates a willed distortion or tension that makes for a highly satisfying and powerful object. It also exemplifies Kendrick's unrelenting interest in interiors and exteriors, resulting here in a wonderful balance of forces.

When he first came to New York, Kendrick "wanted to extend the school situation as look as possible." As he puts it, "The idea of art as a career was an absurdity. There was little evidence of commerce in the galleries. Much of what I saw seemed impossible to sell. Art was more philosophy, a way to experience the world." After graduating from college, Kendrick would quickly go on to earn an MFA from Hunter College in 1973 and soon after was written up in the art magazines. Despite this success, his appraisal is accurate: the problem of an audience for three-dimensional art has continued, with sculptors still the poor relations in the art world. One of Kendrick's strengths as an artist is his genuine commitment to sculpture and to the specific problems of the medium. By remaining close to these issues, he has also maintained his ties to sculpture's philosophical resonance. His commitment to the idea is part of his ongoing involvement with work that occupies both abstract and representational space, as happens, for example in *Amphora B (Pig)* (2002). Here, Kendrick has connected round cuts of barkless wood on a horizontal plane and mounted three vertical blocks of wood in the center. The blonde pieces are aesthetically satisfying in their own right, but the gestalt of *Amphora B (Pig)* is overwhelmingly pig-like. The work conforms to both non-objective and representative idioms, so that Kendrick and his audience can have it both ways.

The wood for *Amphora B (Pig)* originated as a piece from the much larger Amphora A, so the one artwork has given birth to another, accentuating the physical continuity of Kendrick's methods.

In the case of Kendrick's sculpture, the difference between abstract and representational art is moot, a dichotomy that does not do justice to the subtle

exchange that occurs in the spectrum between the readable and the idealized. When Kendrick's work functions in the cusp between the two ways of seeing, it does double duty, convincing us of the beauty of abstract form even as it solidifies into a recognizable composition. The small but exquisitely formed *White Blocks* (2003) can be seen as eloquent exercise in improvisational form, their white-painted parts highlighting specific components. However, the way the planes have been painted accentuates the experience of seeing them as standing figures. In the more abstract works, such as the very large, rough and tumble *Double Core* (2006), in which a wooden structure has been cast in bronze once can observe the pieces seemingly balanced on top of each other. While this work does not copy the form of the human figure, its notions of size and space generally relate to the body. Double Core also suggests, in the transparent history of its manufacture, the human qualities of a sculptor at work, sizing up and deciding how to fix the elements so that they stand out and define a thoroughly three-dimensional sense of things.

Plaster Core (2005), another striking, abstract composition, works with positive and negative space. Kendrick has applied plaster to different parts of the three-tired sculpture, so that there is a marked contrast in tonality between the white of the plaster and the darker wood. Kendrick is arguably at his strongest when investigating the properties of absence and presence. This work, with such complex relations between its components, is highly intellectualized, but in a way that does justice to the sculptural issues involved. The fit between the core and the space it occupied seems nearly perfect, so that the intricacies of its special dimension are engendered from within the piece, rather than from without. A self-consuming artifact, *Plaster Core* treats its own creativity as an end in itself, as if it were discovering its own particularities in volume, space and form.

Recently Kendrick has taken on the photography of his own work. These are printed negatives – the group of photographs is called "Negatives" – in which the sculptures themselves appear as white, with the surrounding space of the image seen as dark matter. According to Kendrick, the negative contains more information than the positive. This reversal of values underscores the interchange of positive and negative space in many of his works. In Tubes (2004), a cluster of tubes extends toward the viewer, the contrast between the darks and lights creating a fascinating experimental photograph. In Balls (2005), much the same occurs: the white balls emerging from the image's middle space appear lit from within, apparently issuing from the white heat of an incendiary explosion. These images recall Man Ray's experiments with rayograms: their sense of mystery appeals by itself and provokes the question of just what it is that we are looking at.

Much of Kendrick's career has encompassed the mysteries of space, and not surprisingly, similar issues arise in the photographic images. His gifts, in both making and thinking about sculptural volumes and surfaces, survive wonderfully from medium to medium.

-Jonathan Goodman is a writer living in New York.

The New York Times

November 9, 2007
Roberta Smith

MEL KENDRICK: 'RED BLOCKS' A strong show from a sculptor who pursues Postminimalism's emphasis on self-evident structure and process, while developing his own affinity for wood, hand-working, eccentric form and, well, Cubism. Each of these small red sculptures has been cut entirely from the red pedestal on which it sits, largely unaltered. The patchwork of positive and negative, mass and silhouette, red and less red makes for a lot of interesting visual guessing, but they transcend puzzling. A much larger, very green piece is especially promising. David Nolan Gallery Inc., 560 Broadway, at Prince Street, SoHo, (212) 925-6190, davidnolangallery.com; closes Nov. 21.

THE BROOKLYN RAIL
CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE

Mel Kendrick. "Untitled (Red Blocks)," (2007). Wood and Japan color. 31 3/4" x 12 7/8" x 12 1/8". KEN1505

October 2007 by Ben La Rocco

Simplicity in a work of art can shock. It has been mistaken for crudeness as with Courbet's reductive brand of realism; for arrogance as with Duchamp's readymade; and for mere in adequacy as with Judd's early work. In each case, an artist's insight into how art could communicate more clearly caused viewers to balk. Is this sort of response still possible? In the age of Jake and Dinos Chapman it seems a little *retardataire* to be shocked by mere simplicity. But we need to differentiate. It is one thing to be appalled by what you're looking at-to be so affected by imagery of pain that you turn away in horror. It is entirely something else for succinctness to jolt your mind into a heightened state of consciousness. These are very different kinds of shock. Although I do not wish to cast aspersions on the former, which has been a legitimate mode of expression since Matthias Grunewald and the *Isenheim Altarpiece*, it is on the later that I wish to concentrate regarding the sculpture of Mel Kendrick.

Kendrick's installation and David Nolan is entitled Red Blocks and consists of ten carved wood abstractions in two small rooms – nine in the front and one in the back. About the right height for sitting, the nine red works are set in an L-shape along the wall of the front room. The tenth piece, by itself in the rear room, is nearly six feet tall, a larger, somewhat scruffier version of its relatives.

Unlike the smaller sculptures whose joints are finessed, the abutments in the large one are visible around swaths of thin, luminous, green paint. All the sculptures are made in the same way: a geometric design is inscribed on a solid rectangle of wood which has been painted with Japan color. The block is then incised along the surface line allowing Kendrick to carve out the topology of an interior mass which is then excavated and placed atop its negative mold, doubling the height of the piece. These are simple, vertical translations in space. There is no rotation, which would cause the top to the sculpture to pivot in relation to its base, or inversion which would flip the top half of the sculpture in relation to the bottom. There are just the positive guts of the block placed evenly over its negative husk.

This simple puzzle, once decoded, allows you to get a bead on Kendrick's understanding of space and to move with him as he feels his way from the two-dimensional surface of each red block to the 3-dimensional mass of its interior. This is traveling on intuition into unknown territory, like a roller coaster in the dark. Shock can be an insight so strong that it makes the raised eyebrows and wrinkled noses of reacting to mere effrontery seem like child's play. Kendrick's art is indebted on the one hand to the emphasis on touch brokered by New York School artists of the de Kooning ilk and on the other to the constructivist rigors of the minimalist art that nudged its way into dominance in the 70's. His work is strictly constructed with a soft touch. It does not over-awe (it never set out to), it seduces.

BOMB

Mel Kendrick by Carroll Dunham

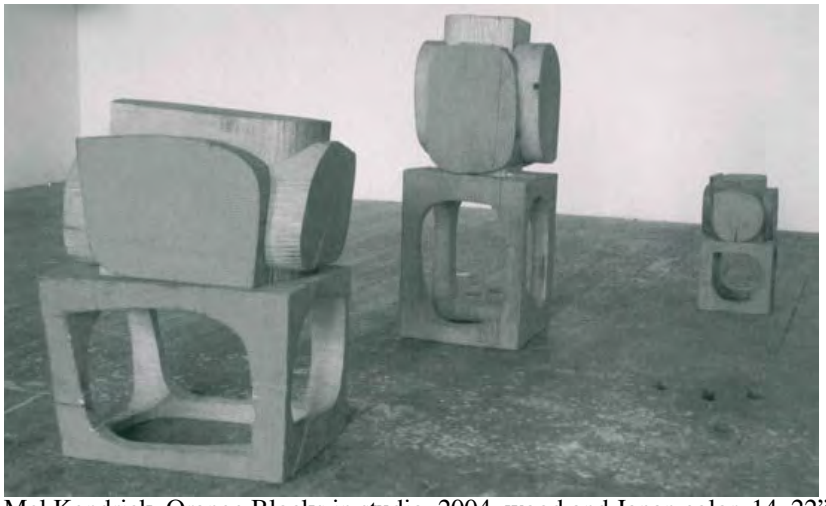
BOMB 89/Fall 2004, ARTISTS ON ARTISTS

Left: Mel Kendrick, Amphora (part B), 2002, wood and steel, 61 x 101 x 44". Right: Mel Kendrick, Cast, 2002, plaster, steel, and wood, 58×60 x 35". All images courtesy of the artist

Mel Kendrick, Amphora (A and B), 2002, wood and steel.

Mel Kendrick's studio has always been filled with tools. The place feels like an extension of his brain and body, a labyrinth of identity projection and maintenance where thought occurs through the manipulation of inert material rather than the coursing circuits of neurotransmission. He always seems to be working toward a crude ideal. There is an awkward, chunky condition of uprightness toward which most of his sculptures aspire, as the problems of how to stay vertical and how to be oriented are solved over and over, both as practical matters and as models for the archetypal parameters of human existence.

In a loose sense Kendrick's primary process is a kind of carving. His most reliable materials have been fragments of trees that retain much of their intrinsic character, and he has found myriad ways of cutting into them, slicing them apart, violating them really, and then redeploying the elements in ways that both rebuild and distort the original. The presence of the original in the sculptural outcome, the simultaneous presence of bracketed natural form and an abstract image/object, connects his work surprisingly to the ancient practices of traditional societies. With Yankee ingenuity Kendrick launched himself from the complementary platforms of process-oriented conceptualism and minimalist sculpture and has followed a trajectory of analytical problem-solving suffused with totemic undertones and allusive implications.



Mel Kendrick, Orange Blocks in studio, 2004, wood and Japan color, 14–22" high.

He has always tried to account for the inside and the outside of the things he makes. This dichotomy has become progressively more poetic and metaphorically fertile. For the past five years Kendrick has been involved in a body of work collectively titled *Core Samples*. The inside of a hunk of wood is removed in its entirety, and the emergent object and the skin left behind become two distinct yet connected objects of inquiry. After a moment of adjustment the relationship between the two descendents of the original resolves into transparency, and the realization that one knows precisely what one is contemplating somewhat counterintuitively deepens the experience. As Kendrick has embraced the obviousness and literalness of his inside/outside concerns there has been a concomitant escalation of content density. Dealing with his pieces of wood as givens that do not need to be formally altered gives them more resonance as embodiments of a (natural) history. It allows them to function almost as models for ourselves: our physical selves and our inner lives seem to have been incarnated in this weirdly juxtaposed statuary.

"Sculpture" thrives in art schools and exhibitions as a meaningless meta-category encompassing everything from conceptual installations to animatronic plastic figures. But the focused elaboration of the options growing out of late modernism that acknowledges the challenges and dead ends laid out by such crucial figures as Tony Smith and Carl Andre has been carried on by diminishing numbers of younger artists who are up to the task. Kendrick's work has always lived within a discourse of materials and procedures; there is nothing in it that is a sign for something else.

His subtle interplay of touch and philosophy in a personal idiom that largely eschews fabrication or editioned objects gives Kendrick's sculptures a particular vulnerability and poignancy. The evolving self-referential narrative of his process asks more and more complex questions about the reciprocal flux of history, the maker and the made.

New York

Mel Kendrick

Nolan/Eckman

For a couple of years in the 1990s, Mel Kendrick stopped making sculptures. He questioned the value, as a sculptor, of creating more and more objects in a world already filled with art. What might he do as an artist that hadn't been already considered? How might he update his favorite material, wood, so that it had relevance to contemporary art practice? Was Kendrick's art, as part of a continuum of tradition, simply too historically minded to make sense as a current statement? In his current show, Kendrick returns to what he has called, in conversation, "attacking the wood." Reentering the world of sculpture, he is again making self-referential objects, whose internal integrity—the consequence of a very strong sense of structure—works outward from within.

Indeed, the kind of thinking that goes into Kendrick's current show is heavily analytical. Kendrick began with large pieces of wood that were then cut into small pieces, with hollow planes revealing the core of the wood. Key to the show is his notion of drawing—while he never draws (putting that "discovery stage" into the work itself), the small works enable him to analyze interior space in a way he would not do when working on a larger sculpture. Additionally, Kendrick showed the works on shelves attached to the gallery walls, raising the level to approximately chest height. This contrasts with the display of his larger works, which are usually placed on the floor or on specially constructed bases. As Kendrick puts it, the cutting and arranging of planes in these small works is "very frugal"; however, the effect of the open and closed planes of space is unusually complex and elaborate. In the small groups of sculptures, it is possible to see him pull out form from within.

Kendrick is at pains to explain that these small works are not about Cubism. The genesis of the forms is quite different, being more about interior space than the shifting planar facets of Cubist art. He is more interested, then, in understanding the objects and the space they contain. In one work (all works are untitled and from 2002), a group of three sculptures, one can see each piece as having a kind of base, painted white and consisting of forms whose middles have been cut away, such that the pieces end in points. On the top half of each form there are elliptical wooden shapes applied around a central core; these shapes, like the bottom of the sculpture, have been painted white, in sharp distinction to the dark-brown (unpainted) surface of the core. Only a few inches high, the work nonetheless impresses with its robust vigor, as well as its intelligence in conjuring both positive and negative spaces despite its diminutive size. It would not suffer by being transformed into a much larger work, primarily because its surfaces are so clearly articulated by both form and hue.

In another piece, Kendrick has created a sculptural work with an open bottom, which consists of four frames painted white. On top are a good many geometric forms—a circle, triangular wedges, and so on. Some of their surfaces have also been covered with white paint, but their interest lies in the way they are set in relation to each other, massed together so that they seem balanced in mid-air. A third work consists of individual slices of wood cut into an overall form so that they follow each other perfectly, seamlessly constructing a gestalt. Considerable areas of their surfaces are painted white, and, in what might be construed as the back of the sculpture, the forms do not so neatly overlap. In another piece, two geometrically shaped works mirror each other, with the forms ending in points in the middle of the sculpture. The rough-hewn parts are painted a dull red, which accentuates the edges of the individually shaped, geometric components. The sculpture looks precariously balanced, as though it might totter and fall if touched.

Although Kendrick is cutting out mundane and simple forms from three directions, the spaces he articulates are wonderfully intricate. In all of these small works, one has the sense that the sculptures are made with a critical intelligence as interested in the interior space of a three-dimensional form as in the way the pieces block out positive space. What is primarily interesting about the sculptures is their serial nature, whereby planar surfaces are treated with a nearly scientific scrutiny as the artist works out subtle changes in form. Kendrick has spoken of "going back and discovering what you already know" so as to make the form forcefully new. This may sound like a paradox, but the comment captures his intuitive knowledge in regard to form. The complexities of his work are most closely related to the improvisational nature of drawing, its capacity for experiment and exploration. And despite their small size, the sculptures are compelling, quite powerful in the implications of their attack.

—*Jonathan Goodman*

LEFT: COURTESY LINDA DURHAM CONTEMPORARY ART, NY / RIGHT: COURTESY NOLAN/ECKMAN GALLERY, NY

SCULPTURE MAGAZINE 12/2003

The New York Times
nytimes.com

January 17, 2003
ART IN REVIEW; Mel Kendrick -- 'Drawings in Wood'
By KEN JOHNSON

Nolan/Eckman Gallery
560 Broadway, at Prince Street
SoHo
Through Feb. 8

Mel Kendrick has been productively toying with the legacy of Cubism for some two decades now. Some of his new small wood sculptures look as though they could have been made 80 years ago. Yet far from being merely cleverly retro, his new compact configurations of elemental shapes have a startling freshness and a robust energy that belie their seemingly modest delicacy.

Contrary to the implication of the exhibition's title, "Drawings in Wood," the sculptures are all three-dimensional; most are small enough to hold in one hand. They are at once transparently legible and mysterious. In several series, Mr. Kendrick has cut cavities from blocks of painted wood with a band saw and then glued the interior parts on top of the hollowed block, creating intricate juxtapositions of positive and negative space and painted and unpainted surfaces.

Presenting from two to six variations, each series is a jazzy play on a theme. Singular sculptures featuring clusters of half-moon, saw-tooth and pyramidal shapes, held up on three or four legs, also convey a feeling of playful improvisation. The mysterious part is the vitality. Many works have an anthropomorphic look, as in a series of two-inch blocks whose wobbly legs make them look like little animals just learning to walk.

In most cases, the liveliness is more abstract. Either way, the work realizes the traditional essence of sculpture as reflected in the stories of Pygmalion and Pinocchio: the magical animation of inert material. KEN JOHNSON

Art in America
FEBRUARY 1996

Mel Kendrick at John Weber - New York, New York - Review of Exhibitions
Robert Taplin

As with many of his peers who have recently taken up casting, Mel Kendrick has become intrigued with the materials and procedures of the process itself, particularly the problems of molding and reproduction. In his recent exhibition at Weber, several sculptures existed in two parts. Typically, sections of a large wooden log which has been chopped, carved and drilled are propped up in a rough vertical stack; then a second, nearly identical version of this arrangement, cast in rubber and propped up in a manner similar to the first, is set nearby. Thus, with the wooden components the viewer is given a privileged sense of observing a spontaneous, possibly provisional studio construction. However, rather than seeing it transformed into the permanence of bronze, one then sees foundry techniques used to provide an even more ephemeral version of the original. Of course, the molding rubber in which the second version is cast has a very different set of qualities than the original wood. Its translucence, color and soft vulnerability have made it a favorite casting material in current sculpture. In Kendrick's case, the rubbery doubles stand next to their mates like fleshy dopplegangers, both more real and less substantial than the wooden logs from which they were generated.

In Big Daddy Fun/Second Version (1995), it looks as though the sculptor started to carve the log, eliminating a few stepped notches, then abandoned the carving. A rubber version was then cast in two parts around a smaller geometric form, which was later removed, leaving a faceted cavity. Splayed to reveal the empty shape inside, the rubber piece is propped up next to the original, which has also been split open to demonstrate its solidity. The little empty core in the rubber form seems to say, "This is the sculpture I refused to make." This quality of slightly comical self-denial is what made the whole show enjoyable. Kendrick's sculpture had become a little over-refined, and all this involvement with replication and redundancy seems to be an attempt to break into a new world of awkward expressiveness.

The largest piece in the show, Black Trunk (1995), returned to Kendrick's older vocabulary of notch and joint, solid and void. A huge tree trunk was cut into sections, hollowed out, and reassembled with some parts missing. These holes are in the form of dovetails, a traditional cabinetry joint used to hold two separate pieces together. Here, as empty gaps, they are, again, elegantly redundant. The piece sits on marvelously stumpy legs and was accompanied in the show by a large drawing taken by wrapping sheets of paper around the sculpture and making a rubbing. Flattened out on the wall, the drawing presented an older, simpler means of creating a double. In the end, I appreciate the gutsy directness of Black Trunk and its drawing more than the complicated self-ironies of the other sculptures.

ARTFORUM
JANUARY 1994 INTERNATIONAL

Mel Kendrick at John Weber Gallery, New York, New York
Donald Kuspit

The fascination with wood grain has a long Modernist history, from Paul Gauguin and Edvard Munch through Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque to Max Ernst and Andre Masson. Mel Kendrick's woodblock "relief" drawings (all 1993) are a remarkable contribution to that history, reaffirming one's sense of the medium as a liminal matrix of visual meaning. More particularly, wood grain signifies the organic--earthy, bodily--root of the creative process. Its appearance is uncanny: it looks irregular, random, and unintelligible, yet also fraught with profound meaning. In fact, it is a precise, decipherable record of the vicissitudes of growth. Like the lines on a seismograph, it registers the truth of an inner movement. For Kendrick to reaffirm this "primitive" symbol of process--of eccentric yet exact expression--is for him to rebel against the post-Modern idea of art as the discourse of seemingly self-manipulating codes. But it is also, paradoxically, an acknowledgement that wood grain has in fact become a historical code--a standard language of the mysteriously prelinguistic (sometimes misread as a groping toward language). Kendrick in effect quotes wood grain as much as he uses its "originality," unwittingly suggesting a deeper, more decadent post-Modern truth: that all languages are peculiarly "postlinguistic," that is, they are like Latin--they come alive when they are quoted, but are of interest only for the patina their form gives discourse, not for what they communicate.

Eccentric shapes form very flat figures on the ground of the wood grain like scrambled quotations of parts of Kendrick's three-dimensional, abstract wood constructions. This is the case particularly in 3 Plates and F, but is also implicit in 5 Slits and 10 Loops Slit, where the forms suggest the carving/cutting process of working in wood rather than the resulting shapes. The effect is not unlike that of Marcel Duchamp's Tu M', 1918, a kind of inventory of his works (mostly ready-mades), which exist here in the quasi-nostalgic form of shadows--that is, in the ambiguous space of the living past. Indeed, Kendrick's Split Spiral reduces it to a famous Modernist emblem, the target (a kind of grid manque), treated as a ghost of itself. Moreover, Kendrick's double take of the spiral indicates the horns of the dilemma he is stuck on: on one side we have a "post-Modernized" target--a quotation shadowing the remote, even unreachable goal--and on the other side a cross section of the body, more particularly, a kind of CAT scan of the pelvic bone, a "Modernistic" revelation of primitive bodily structure. Trapped between a longing for the old Modern primordiality and a post-Modern sense of deja vu, Kendrick reveals our true artistic condition.

HIGHLIGHT

From the Art Institute of Chicago, 1994

Mel Kendrick's *Ten Loops Slit*

Two debuts: A striking new woodblock drawing enhances the new look of Gallery 203.

By Richard Campbell

Drawing and printmaking are integral ro the aesthetic development of sculpror Mel Kendrick, one of America's most innovative and distinctive contemporary artists. In 1994 the Institute acquired a large-scale woodblock drawing by Kendrick titled *Ten Looj1s Slit* (see cover). He composed the piece by pressing densely inked planks of rough- and fine-grade plywood onto a thick, absorbent sheet of Japanese *Kozo* paper measuring nine by eight feet. He cut through the surface of the plywood with a reciprocating saw in a series of looping motions, with the blade defi ning the oval shapes and transcribing the artist's manual gestures. The "loops" are circumscribed by white haloes produced by incisions in the plywood and appear ro float on the surface of the paper. In turn, a series of 12 oblique, zigzagging "slits" alternately penetrate the "loops" and interrupt their organic flow-rather the way underwater predarors dart through a school of fish. The wood grain, the saw and grinder marks, and the imprints from protruding screw heads in the wood planks impart ro the drawing an effect of three-dimensional sculpture.

In fact, Kendrick created his series of Ten Loops woodblock drawings in conjunction with a series of black-oil sculptures executed between 1991 and 1992. This body of work constitutes a radical departure from Kendrick's earlier sculpture, which was heavily influenced by the rigid geometry, serialization, architectural orientation, and emotional detachment of Carl Andre, Sol LeWitt, Mel Bochner, and Barry LeVa. During the 1980s Kendrick abandoned his grid structures and progressed from floor and wall pieces to large-scale, freestanding objects. The black-oil sculptures are the culmination of his post-minimalist experiments with ironic, anthropomorphic references, hands-on carving, paint, and organic construction.

In 1990 Kendrick stopped exhibiting sculpture at gallery shows in New York and Los Angeles .and focused his attention on printmaking. He produced a portfolio of six untitled woodcuts, which were printed by Leslie Miller at the Grenfell Press and published in an edition of 25 by Ilene Kurtz Editions, New York. Kendrick also contributed a pair of *wood cuts-Little Cock* and *Giraffe,* which illustrate texts by Bradford Morrow-ro a collaborative artists' book published in an edition of 100 by the Grenfell Press.

Mel Kendrick and *Ten Loops Slit*

Concerning these works, Kendrick observed: "The prints cleared up a lot of thoughts about what is the real difficulty of sculptu re, which is basically that nothing is defined. But as long as I put something on paper, no matter what I do, I'll be creating an image. It was important for me to have the prints exist in sort of a parallel structure. They're not about the sculptures, but more or less inform them. I also like the idea that wood block printing is an aggressively low-tech way of working. Each time, the image is a surprise ro me." These prints anticipate the woodblock drawi ngs in three ways-the exploitation of the wood-grain surface, the eccentric shapes, and the fact they were executed with a handsaw.

Sculpture No. 3, 1991
Wood, lamp back. linseed oil, and paper
Courtesy of the John Weber Gallery
Photo: George Erml

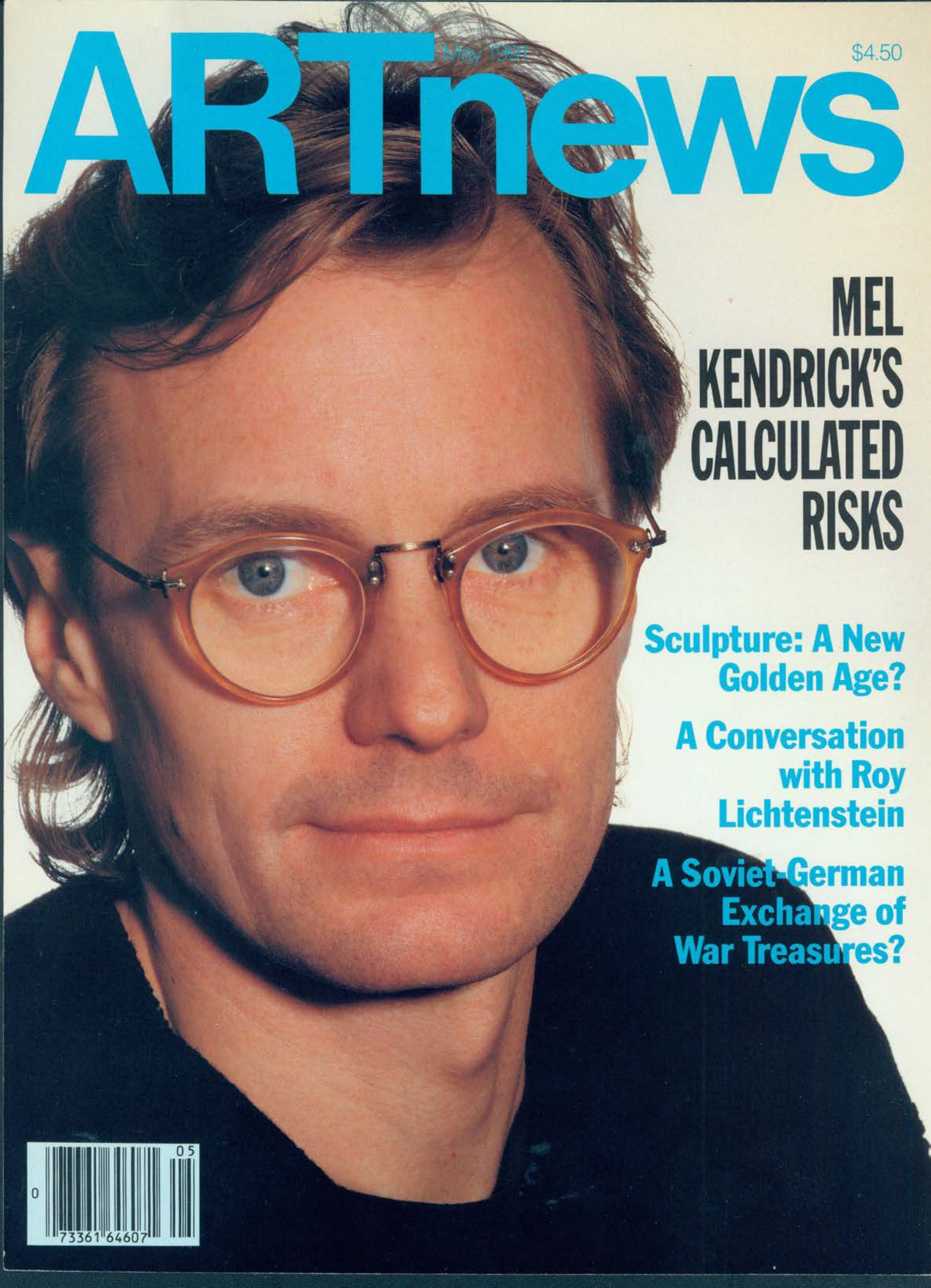
Richard Campbell is thejohn E. Andrus III Curator of Prints and Drawings.

Kendrick's *Ten Loops Slit* will make its debut at the Insri tute on *J* une 9, when Gallery 203 reopens in the reinstalled East Wing.

The author consulted the following resources in preparing this piece: *Mel Kendrick: Black-Oil Sculpture and Drawings 1991-92,* by Trevor Richardson; "Mel Kendrick's Calculated Risks," by Michael Boodro, in *Art News;* "Mel Kendrick and the Well-Added Object," by Bruce W. Ferguson, in *Art in America;* "Prints and Phorographs Published," in *Print Collector's Newsletter;* "Artist's Book Bear," by Nancy Princenthal, in *Print Collector's Newsletter.*

Little Cock, plate from *A Bestiary*
Grenfell Press, 1990
Woodcut
Gilt of the Print and Drawing Council, 1991

ARTnews
May 1991
$4.50



MEL KENDRICK'S CALCULATED RISKS

Sculpture: A New Golden Age?

A Conversation with Roy Lichtenstein

A Soviet-German Exchange of War Treasures?

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ANTHONY BARBOZA

ABOVE The artist in his studio, where the plywood cutouts he uses for his wood-block prints are spread out on a table, below. Bandsaw blades hang on the wall by a rack of bar clamps.

cover of auction-house catalogues, although they have brought six-figure sums and are in the permanent collections of museums across the country, including the Dallas Museum of Art, the Walker Art Institute in Minneapolis, the High Museum in Atlanta, and the Whitney and Metropolitan museums in New York. He has been with the same dealer, John Weber, for more than a decade, and he has been married for seven years to Mary Salter, a comedy-film producer who works for cable TV's Comedy Network. They are the parents of three children—Max, five; Jack, three; and Willa, who was born in February.

"It's nice to be married to someone not in the art world," Kendrick says with a smile. "A great many of our friends are artist couples. The art world tends to take over our lives more than do other careers. It's the nature of this business." Still, Kendrick has his outlets, not the least of which is a house and studio on Long Island, where he likes to wind-surf.

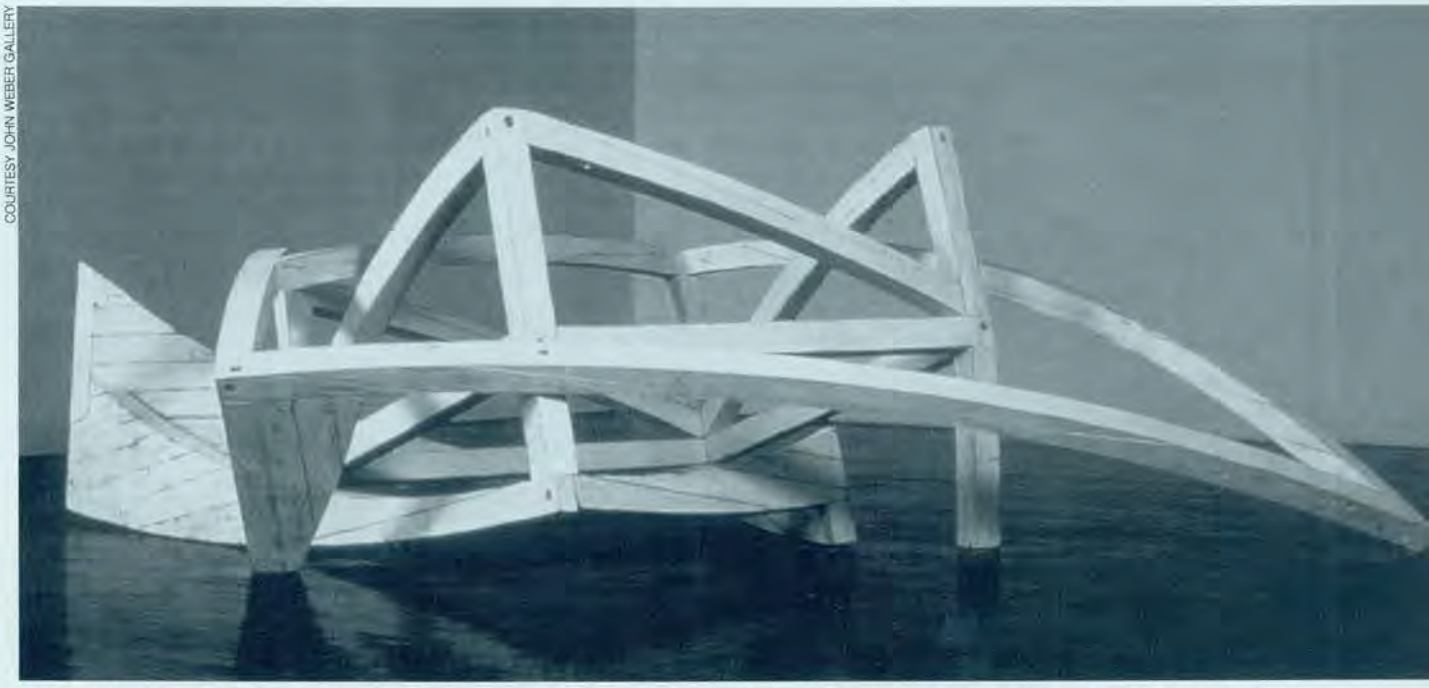
The fact that Kendrick has observed traditional social conventions does not mean that he has followed the rules in his work. Anyone who has looked carefully at his art over the past decade and a half can't help realizing that this artist has challenged virtually every dictum of contemporary sculpture.

In a period when attention has centered on installations and earthworks, Kendrick has devoted himself to freestanding objects meant to be viewed indoors. He has bent and curved and finally broken away from the geometry of Minimalism. In an age that has venerated the purity of materials, he maintains that he attaches little meaning to his. Kendrick has worked largely in wood but hasn't hesitated to paint his sculptures or to cast some of the wood pieces in bronze. And while avant-garde sculptors have been wrestling with the force of gravity, Kendrick has been lifting up many of his small pieces on old-fashioned bases.

Reflecting on the evolution of his work, Kendrick says, "When you come out of art school, you're full of doctrine. In a sense that's the only time you know exactly what you're doing. You can label what is good art, what is correct art. You know the way things should look. My first years in New York I was probably more specific, more sure of myself than I've ever been since. But that knowledge falls apart. You have to overcome the strong doctrine of taste. Essentially, you have to make something that would have been abhorrent to you at an earlier time."

The Manhattan art scene in 1971 was small, intense, and as codified as a medieval court. Minimalism and Conceptualism reigned, and even the biggest thought was likely to yield only the tiniest visual impression. Few people had as intensive an introduction to the scene as Kendrick. He'd graduated from Trinity and was studying with Robert Morris and Tony Smith at Hunter College, where he got his M.A. in 1973. He began working as a studio assistant for the noted Minimalist Dorothea Rockburne, then at a peak in her career. "Working with Dorothea," Kendrick recalls, "I was suddenly injected into a situation where I was having dinner with people like Carl Andre and Sol LeWitt and Mel Bochner, people I had read about in the art magazines.

ANTHONY BARBOZA



COURTESY JOHN WEBER GALLERY

By 1980 Kendrick had begun drawing on some of the ideas of Futurism. *Balla*, for example, which is composed of sweeping arcs coming off a central square, was "a visual response to a group of drawings by the Futurist Giacomo Balla."

Dorothea was very generous to me in that way."

But Kendrick soon realized that there was little room for advancement as an assistant and that the scene he so admired had its drawbacks. "The art world was very closed at that point. These people had staked out their positions around the circle. What could you try to do, slide in between Ryman and Mangold? How did you give your work some little kick? It couldn't be too different, because I totally bought the premise of all this other work. This was the art world. It knew what was good and what wasn't good, what was important and what wasn't important."

Inspired by Rockburne, Bochner, and Barry Le Va, Kendrick began making simple installations using building materials such as tar paper and wood slats. "Everything changed," he explains. "I stopped making objects. Everything was an installation. It was coming out of all that Minimal stuff. It was all about systems, the analysis of relationships. This piece of tar paper is held up by a wood slat, this corner curls over because it isn't. They were very dry and more rigorous—at least superficially," he adds and laughs.

For his first New York show, at Artists Space in 1974, Kendrick used leaning panels of Masonite and white paint in an effort to blur the boundaries of floor, wall, and object. In 1979 at P.S.1, the alternative space in Queens, New York, he constructed a sort of table-tower that filled the room. He thought of it as a kind of drawing on the floor with its lines extended upward by wood four-by-fours. But there was a problem. "I realized afterward that it was viewed as an architectural piece, which really didn't interest me at all. I was thinking about it very formally."

That same year Kendrick had a small one-man show of perforated-aluminum wall pieces at the A. M. Sachs Gallery in New York. He considered the show a failure in that "it was such a tight presentation that it was totally dull. I realized that if I had just taken five things at random from my studio and put them in the gallery it would have been a better show." As Kendrick now sees it, "Everything was serial—it was all systems and synapses. Everything had to have intent, repetition, analytical understanding. I had this revelation that variations are not interesting. Let one stand for the whole thing."

Having grown up in a suburb on the north shore of Boston, the younger son of a banker and a housewife, Kendrick recalls a "pretty routine '50s" boyhood. "The only art in our house was defined by subject matter. My father would buy any picture with a boat in it." Kendrick attended Andover, the Massachusetts prep school. Unhappy at the time, and not doing very well academically, he took refuge in art, particularly film and photography. "It was in the air then," he says. "Everybody was interested in film and photography." During that period, he was also considering becoming a mathematician, which is not surprising given the large role geometry played in his early work.

Kendrick graduated from Andover in 1967 and went straight to Trinity College, which turned out to have a very good sculpture department that included Terence La Noue and Dieter Froese. "When I was growing up," Kendrick recalls, "the idea of being an artist wasn't even remotely possible. And I was still caught up in the idea of talent, the idea that you would know if you were an artist, you'd be a prodigy or something. But it was amazing how quickly things changed, month by month, the whole idea of what it was possible for a person to do."

By the late '70s Kendrick had come to realize that if he wanted to continue to deal with geometry he would somehow have to "put some life back into it." He introduced curves and began moving away from a grid structure. The pieces became gawkier. "I was doing a lot of loosening up. Actually, my whole thing as an artist has always been, loosen up, loosen up. I set up a system to make a sculpture that wouldn't even sit on the ground, and then I would drop some legs down to support it—that was very amusing to

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me." At the same time, he was also making wall pieces, which tended to be "spidery and lighter."

Then, "a major thing happened," Kendrick says. "The pieces couldn't be planned. I could no longer plan what was going to happen with drawings; I couldn't envision what something was going to be like in the end. I set these systems rolling, these arcs and these lines, but it was all so three-dimensional that I couldn't project it through drawings. Things were going haywire. Actually, they were beginning to look like sculpture. Before, there had been a fear of anything looking like a sculpture. Yet I didn't want my work to look architectural, either. I was getting closer to the idea that the concept of sculpture is acceptable, that you can't question every boundary all the time, every day, in everything you do."

Ever since, Kendrick's pieces have been immediately identifiable as sculptures. They just don't look like anyone else's. As his friend from Andover days, painter Carroll Dunham, sees it, "At no point has Mel arbitrarily changed his work. But as it's developed it's become better. It's become more and more itself. His career has definitely been about loosening up. Mel's work has always been about systems, and now I think he's accepted that *he* is a system, that he has a particular way of working. That frees the objects to look quite a bit different from one another. Now, within the terrain he's defined, he can follow his nose."

Brenda Richardson, deputy director for art of the Baltimore Museum of Art, which owns one of the artist's wood-block prints, is a longtime Kendrick admirer. She finds him "steady and remarkably self-contained." In considering his affinities to other sculptors, she points to Martin Puryear and Joel Shapiro—"Puryear, because of the evident handwork and craft that are so much a part of both his work and Kendrick's; and Shapiro, because, despite the fact that his work is abstract, there is always a figurative aspect to it."

John Weber, who first showed Kendrick's work in 1976 in an invitational exhibition, having learned of him from Rockburne and other artists, sees a consistency in his development, even as his sculptures have changed from sprawling, linear forms on the floor or wall to more solid, vertical pieces of undeniable heft and substance.

"I was first attracted by the post-Minimal look of his work," Weber remembers. "It was very much my bag at the time. What's changed in Mel's work is not so much the content as the form. His work has always been, and remains, very much about displacement, about chopping up and rearranging. The ideas are very similar to those of the early works; the intention is still the same." Now that Kendrick has achieved a steady market in this country, with prices ranging from $15,000 to $165,000, Weber sees his role as increasing Kendrick's visibility in Europe, where he is not very well known.

COURTESY JOHN WEBER GALLERY

For his wood piece *White Wall*, 1984, Kendrick was "trying to bring drawing from two dimensions to three."

The '80s marked several turning points for Kendrick. After showing in several group shows at John Weber Gallery, he was asked to join its roster of largely Minimalist artists and had his first one-man show there in 1980. He had begun incorporating into his pieces a number of the ideas of Futurism, including the roughness and spontaneity of some of Umberto Boccioni's early plaster works. Kendrick's sculpture *Balla* (1980), a low wooden frame with sweeping arcs coming into a central square, was conceived as "a visual response to a group of drawings by Giacomo Balla that incorporated a central square and sweeping pencil arcs." Kendrick was also interested in Brancusi at the time and the early, more horizontal works of Alberto Giacometti. He was extremely impressed by the huge Picasso exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in 1980, noting Picasso's energy and how little editing he did. "I was more open to looking around," he states.

In 1983, in the midst of what he characterizes as "a busy, very prolific period," Kendrick had an exhibition of small works at Weber, was included in a three-person show at BlumHelman in New York, and showed at Margo Leavin Gallery in Los Angeles. "It was then that I first realized that scale doesn't matter, a work doesn't have to be big to be good. Sculpture doesn't have to be a massive, physical thing. My small pieces were definitely sculptures; they weren't models or maquettes for anything else. I thought of them as sort of doodles, little sketches. They were far more direct, far more enjoyable to make, and, I realized, far more personal." Of course, the small size raised a question of presentation. The simplest solution was also the most radical. "I don't think I'd ever seen a sculpture on a base, such was the nature of the art world in the '70s. I must have, but if I did, I discounted it immediately—I didn't give it the time of day," he says, laughing. And while using a support was contrary to the tenets of Minimalism, he found that it didn't confuse his work. "Even when the base and what's on top of it are the same material, the state of mind with which they're constructed is different. So there's always a delineating line be-

tween what's on and what's under." But almost as soon as he'd come to terms with the base, Kendrick moved on again to bigger pieces. "Size is not an idea, it's a mood, a challenge. I had no interest in bases as an issue."

Kendrick turned to making wood-block prints last year as a respite, after deciding not to show for a year. "The prints cleared up a lot of thoughts about what is the real difficulty of sculpture, which is basically that nothing is defined. But as long as I put something on paper, no matter what I do, I'll be creating an image." He uses pieces of cheap plywood and manipulates their shapes, the impression of the grain, and colors to create his images. "It was important to me to have the prints exist in a sort of parallel structure. They're not about the sculptures, but more or less inform them. I also like the idea that wood-block printing is an aggressively low-tech way of working. Each time, the image is a surprise to me." The woodblocks were printed by Leslie Miller for Editions Ilene Kurtz in New York, where they sell for $1,500 to $4,500.

Increasingly, Kendrick has cast pieces in bronze, but he feels the material is difficult because "it's loaded with nostalgia," with its evocations of everything from classical grandeur to garden ornaments and phony relics. "On the other hand, I'm less suspicious of that than I am of seeing yet more rolled lead, beeswax, and copper conduits, or stacks of felt. *Arte povera* materials are now so accepted, you can indicate your seriousness simply by using them."

His wood sculptures are almost always made of a single piece, which is cut up, often with a chain saw, and then reassembled, leaving the process of their construction—cuts, drawn lines, drips of glue—clearly visible. Such is the case with the *White Wall* (1984), "a transitional work." He first painted the surface, then drew on it with pencil. "I was consciously trying to bring drawing from two dimensions to three. The lines guided the cutting." But in his most recent work, he has abandoned drawing altogether.

Sitting before his most recent piece, *Osage with Two Squares (Bronze)* (1990), which appears at first to be wood but is actually bronze that has been carefully colored by means of chemicals to resemble the effects of weather and moss on bark, Kendrick talks about the trompe l'oeil, faux bois effect. "It's more than representational," he explains. "It's the thing itself but functioning on another level. Once you're aware it's not wood, the chemical ooze on the surface becomes a parallel reality. It's not moss, not a tree. It's actually a very simple piece. Everything that has been done to it is quite mundane, quite visible. I'm interested in the concept of the dumb object," Kendrick continues, "but it's sort of a smart dumb object. Things have been done to it, but you're not exactly sure why or how or what. The transformation from wood to bronze heightens that. Why has someone gone to all the trouble? That is almost part of the subject matter."

Although he works alone in the studio, one of his major influences has been the activity of his family one floor above. "Having children has certainly changed not only my sense of time—I work on a schedule now, and I find I get much more work done—but also my perceptions about my work. There certainly are parallels between the perceptions of a child and those of an artist. One thing that has always interested me is how, if you give a small child a gift, say a toy car, children aren't culturally aware that the car is the toy, so they play with the box. I find that a fascinating point of perception. What's really great is if, as an artist, you can look at all things as being equal, not put the cultural baggage on the object, and can regain that kind of awareness of how amazing the box really is." ■

COURTESY JOHN WEBER GALLERY

***Osage with Two Squares (Bronze)*, 1990. "Once you're aware it's not wood, the chemical ooze on the surface becomes a parallel reality."**

COURTESY DAVID MCKEE GALLERY

ABOVE William Tucker's *Demeter*, 1991, a goddess in plaster, is a superb example of contemporary sculpture in which the emphasis is on the object's physical properties. OPPOSITE Italian Umberto Cavenago's *Telescopio*, 1990, one of his galvanized steel "vehicles," represents the trend toward installations in which context is all for the object or objects placed in a special space.

Mel Kendrick and The Well-Adjusted Object

Taking the traditional slide show and lecture as the format for a two-part interview, sculptor Mel Kendrick here looks back on the first twenty years of a career that has, by chance and by design, both commented on and extended modernist form.

INTERVIEWED BY BRUCE W. FERGUSON

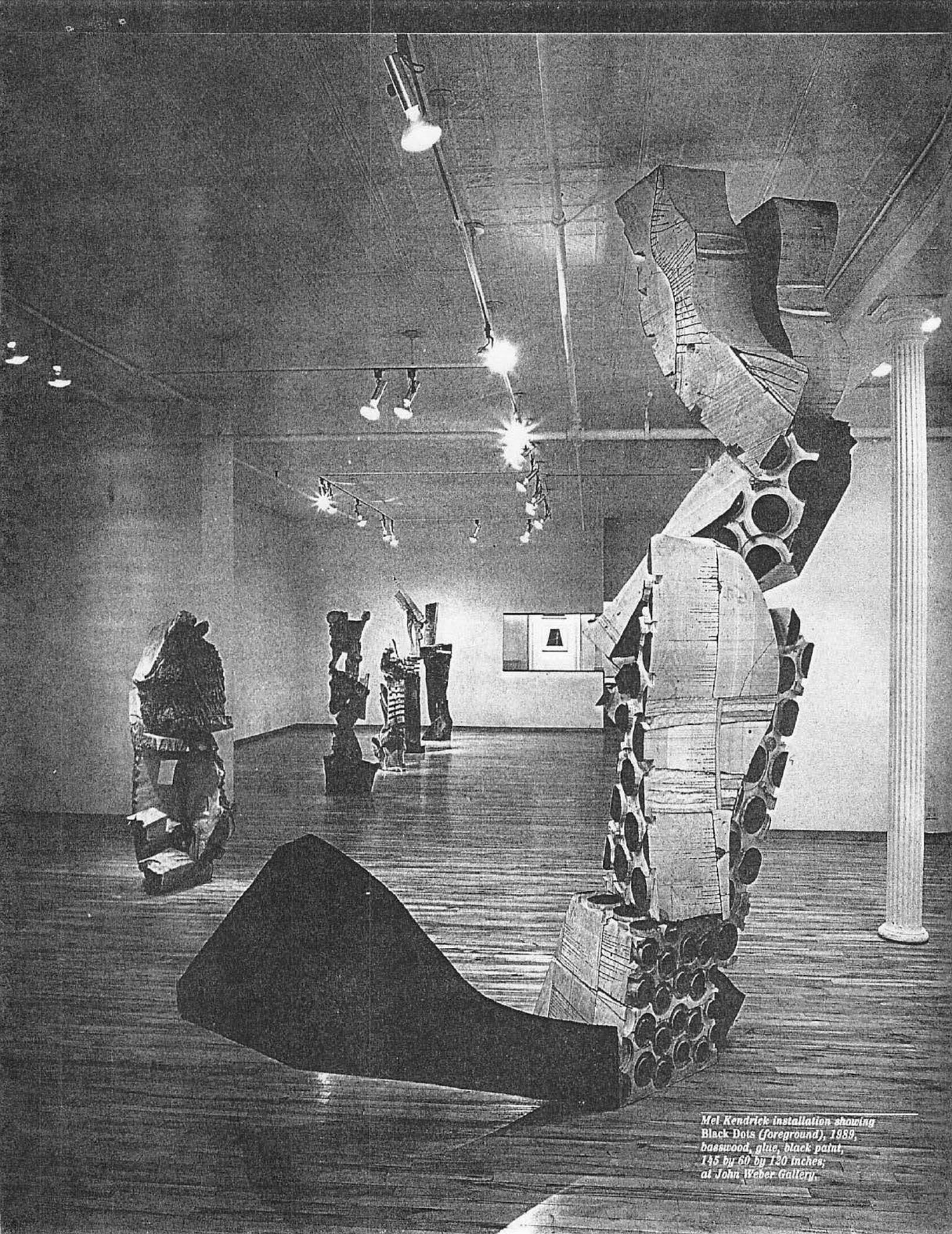
This interview with sculptor Mel Kendrick is in two parts, and in both cases the voice is entirely his own. The first section deliberately mimics the format of an artist's slide lecture, while the second suggests the kind of elaboration that might occur in a subsequent question-and-answer period. The hope is that this method of presentation might reflect Kendrick's own working method, which is characterized by a deliberate habit of self-interruption—the practical constraints of physical material (its case-by-case specificity) alternating with intellectual concerns inherited from the theorists of high modernism. In working from materials to ideas and back again, Kendrick adheres to an idealism that seeks to reconcile these two impulses, and to the sort of idealism that was long the Sisyphean lot of modernist abstraction. However, like Dorothea Rockburne, to name but one example, Kendrick applies his method with a rigor that finally causes his work to contradict or disavow its original systemic premise. By exaggeratedly obeying a governing logic of arbitrary methods, Kendrick produces an apparently irrational mode of sculpture that restlessly and actively strays between abstraction and figuration, between the conceptually unified and the perceptually accidental, between the serious and the comic.

It's worth noting that Kendrick's very manner of addressing his work makes explicit the degree to which the historical avant-garde and its late modernist applications were already canonical for Kendrick's generation and, so, necessarily subject to reconsideration. His remarks likewise make clear how the deep contradictions implicit in institutionalized modernism resulted in the rupture now commonly associated with the postmodern. However, Kendrick—perhaps perversely—decided to reject neither the historical precedent of modernism nor his personal apprenticeships. (He had studied at Hunter College under Tony Smith, worked for Dorothea Rockburne and first showed at the John Weber Gallery.) Instead, he has sought to explore the gaps within modernist abstract sculpture itself rather than engage in any of the range of practices that others have recently taken up as alternatives—the sentimental exploration of the faux-naif, for example, or the mass-media critical examinations that we've seen in such profusion lately. His work is less a critique of modernism than a reexamination of some marginal aspects of the avidly self-consuming course of its history.

Inevitably, then, in Kendrick's pieces there is a subtle and ironic commentary upon the modernist ideal, but one constituted by the materiality of the sculptures themselves rather than by any more cerebral polemic. Kendrick's work reintroduces subjects and methods which were cast aside in high modernism's violent rush to a constantly self-supplanting notion of "progress." An inventory of these reintroductions would include modesty of scale, the sculptural base, a visible relationship between working tool and material and a preference for drawing in space rather than taking possession of it. All his works evidence a wry humor and tender intelligence, as they simultaneously mock and yearn for an idealism that seems exhausted.

The oscillation of Kendrick's attention between the sculpture and its base, nature and culture, materials and ideas, the general and the particular, falls well within the established dialectical structure of modernism. However, at the same time, Kendrick's consistent avoidance of the nostalgia and sentimentality associated with a simple return to former practice prompts the viewer to regard his efforts as somehow neo-modernist rather than revivalist in intent. Both the artist's use of a chain saw—with its implicit expressionistic effect—and his propensity for exotic colored woods, which he sometimes casts in bronze to emphasize their unexpectedly artificial qualities, defy the canonical sanctity of the artist's "hand" and any unquestioning affection for the "natural," while simultaneously demanding a reconsideration of both. In the physical intractability of the materials Kendrick has chosen, as well as in his self-imposed decision to work from within the modernist shadow, the artist seems to be releasing some of the possibilities still offered by high modernism. As a result, he makes modest but important claims for a reconsideration of the power of an abstract object realized without the aid of ironic referents.

—B.W.F.



Mel Kendrick installation showing Black Dots *(foreground), 1989, basswood, glue, black paint, 145 by 60 by 120 inches; at John Weber Gallery.*

1

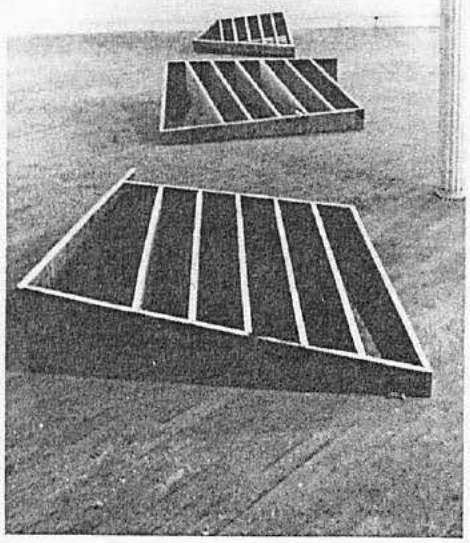
Like a Slide Show

1. Acceleration of a Circle in the Street, 1972

plaster dust

This piece was heavily influenced by Carl Andre's and Richard Serra's work—specifically by the Serra ring on the street which I had seen only in photographs. I made the plaster circles as large as they could be between the opposite sidewalks. My object was to use the arbitrary limits and space of the street to create the illusion of movement—a stroboscopic effect of visual acceleration—within this very simple form. Cars on the street created an actual flow and dispersal by literally breaking the circles down. . . . ("Entropy" was the key word in 1972.)

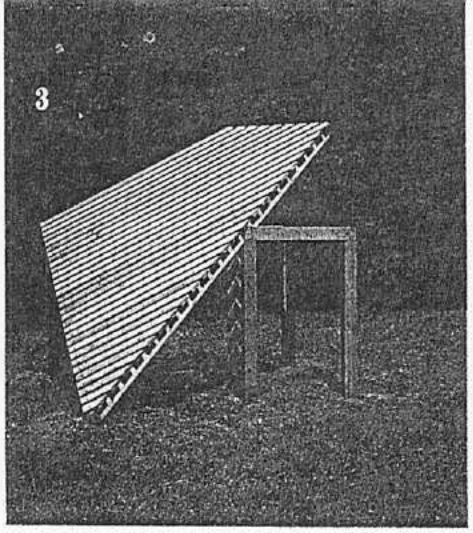
2



2. Shelving, 1975

wood, 12 by 48 by 48 inches each

For the "shelving" pieces I started with a wooden square on the floor and then tipped it up on edge. I would tip it seven degrees, swing a side of it to a right angle, then tip the whole piece again seven degrees on another axis, then swing out another right angle, plus another seven degrees and so on. The result was "converging bookcases," with parallel lines off one edge of the shape. They seemed to be both about perception and about breaking rules. The discourse of geometry had its underlying rationality skewed by these interventions to reveal a more dramatic, baroque and exaggerated aspect than usual.

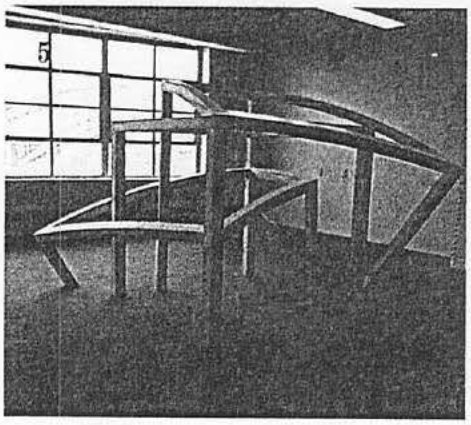


3. Tilt Table, 1977
wood, 7 by 8 by 8 feet

In this outdoor piece, I again used the transition of a square to a trapezoid by successively tipping the planes. The work again had the history of its own making in it—an internalized record of how this object evolved from a square. But the shape that resulted is even more extreme than in *Shelving* because the tilting becomes more acute with each move. By constructing the slats as a partially transparent surface, using the technique of Maine porch building, I could use the thickness of one part as the guide for the next. The problem with this piece, like most sculpture that size, is that, placed in a natural setting, it's like an earring dropped on a carpet.

4. Untitled, 1979
wood, 126 by 84 by 84 inches

This piece for P.S. 1 evolved from a plan which was drawn on the floor. After swinging the lines and taking the measurements, I set the band saw to the corresponding degrees for cutting the wood. The piece was then lifted off the plan. The legs are the points that intersect with the original (floor) plan. What I was beginning to realize at this time was that my work was being completely misinterpreted. People talked to me about its relation to architecture. Because my working life was so inundated with construction materials, I was blind to the connotations of construction and architecture. I discovered that artistic intent can be undermined by the use of materials whose references are to the common cultural associations of its descriptive qualities. At that point, I decided to abandon "dimension lumber."

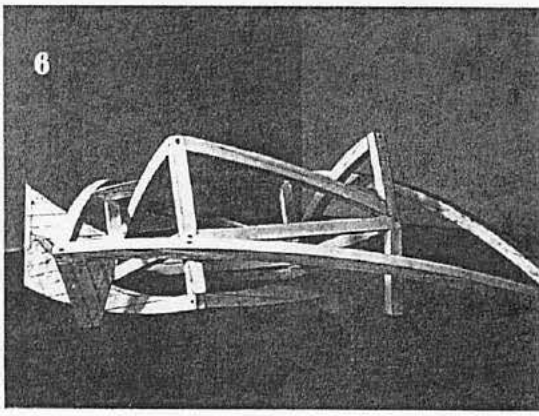


5. Mullah, 1980
painted wood, 74 by 142 by 83 inches

Here, something happened in the realization which wasn't anticipated in the floor plan drawings. The curve was developed in small pieces by lamination. On the larger scale, when the curve was cut, the convex and concave parts were reglued with resorcinol resin. What had been the outside of the wood became the inside and vice versa. I put plaster spackle on the surface and sanded it back to accentuate the process of construction by visually clarifying the joints and the joining process. That tended to give the individual parts both volume and form. I wanted it to read as a physical construction, not just a geometric one. It was close to the look of a LeWitt, but the fact that it was a system that *didn't* work made all the difference. And, importantly, it was moving away from any architectural reference. What I then needed was to also move away from the reference to the grid.

6. Balla, 1981
painted wood, 48 by 163 by 102 inches

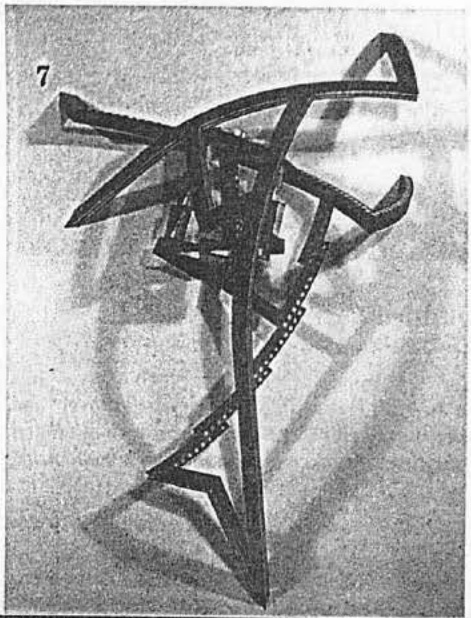
In the fall of 1981, I had my first one-person show with John Weber Gallery at 420 West Broadway in New York. The building had been an icon for the past decade's (Minimalist) developments, the same period during which I had been in the city. In this piece I took on the problem of breaking down the grid. Having seen drawings by Balla in London, I decided that I liked the short, hot summer of the Futurists. I

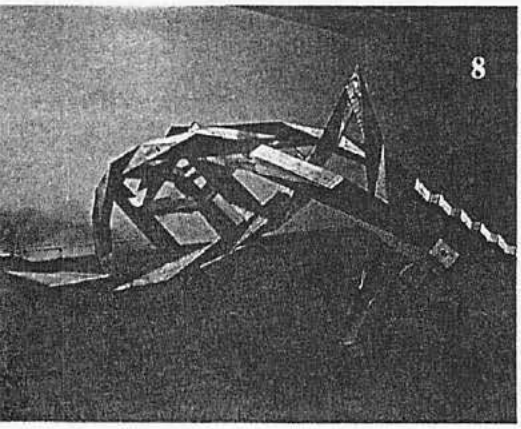


liked their quirkiness and the rawness of their vision. For instance, Balla glued a square paper in the center of a larger sheet and drew lines which swept in and out, becoming very active. From my own point of view, I wanted an object that seemed as though it had been dropped arbitrarily into place with all its legs extended to hold it there.

7. Behind the Cross, 1982
laminated poplar, plaster, ink, 71½ by 43 by 21 inches

This wall piece, the last I made, was kerfed to create curves. Kerfing is a type of cut where the cut-out squares show in the curvature. I had just been in Italy and had seen many Renaissance crucifixes. From the back of those structures, you can see that the cross is adjusted for the figure's knees and elbows, which stick out—the reference for the title of this piece. When I looked at this work, I realized that it still had a cube at its center. However perforated and destroyed—by the tipped trapezoid, the lines and the systems of kerfing—this cube still seemed to generate the main energy of the sculpture. Because it stood upright in the studio, the piece suggested the process of making something vertical. In the wall pieces I had worked on there was no distinction between up and down. In retrospect, I realize that I had been working predominantly on the wall because I felt insecure about occupying the floor.

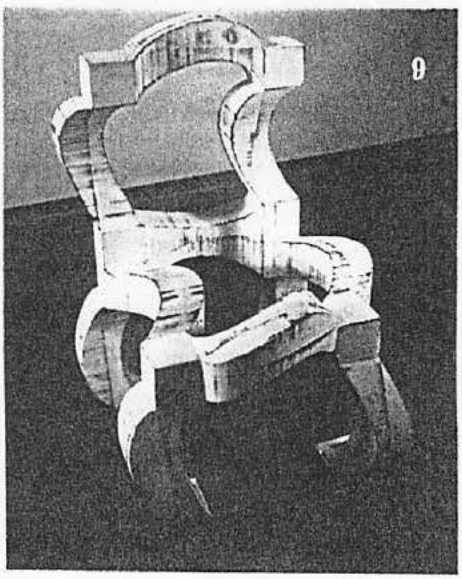




8. Black Line, 1982

poplar, plaster, ink, 66 by 216 by 140 inches

Working toward a show, I felt that I had to get going with the "real" work. At the same time, I had a large piece of poplar, and from it I was making small totemic pieces. I thought I was using them to deliberately stall, but then I realized that they were what I was doing. It was like realizing that telephone doodles are as revealing as other aspects of your consciousness. Up to that point, my work had a basis in construction—the materials, the joints, the bolts all came out of contracting work that I was doing. Suddenly, I made a leap into another concept of sculpture, even though its boundaries were already well known. I started *sculpting*, dealing with shapes and materials which were defined outside of the narrow realm of Minimalist and Post-Minimalist alterations of geometric space.



9. Untitled (White Chair), 1982

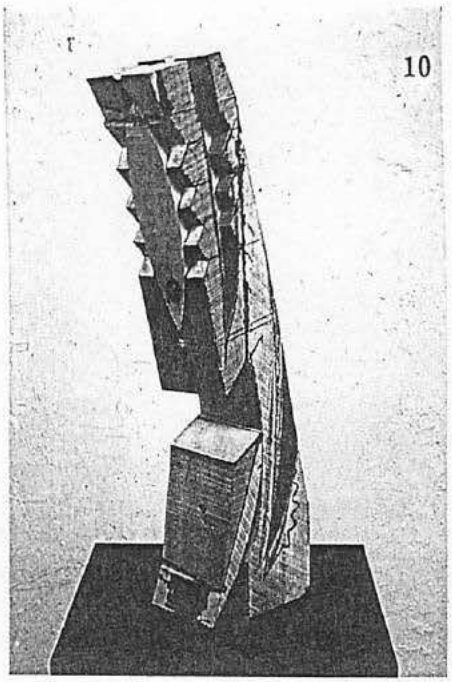
wood, plaster, stain, 34 by 20 by 22 inches

Here, I have curves passing through curves—lots of fragments from turning triangles over and over. I used ships' curves for transformation and variations; untouched wood was stained black, and the parts that were moved were stained blue. The parts that were left over stayed red and were hidden under white plaster.

10. Permission, 1982

poplar, 24½ by 84⅛ by 4½ inches

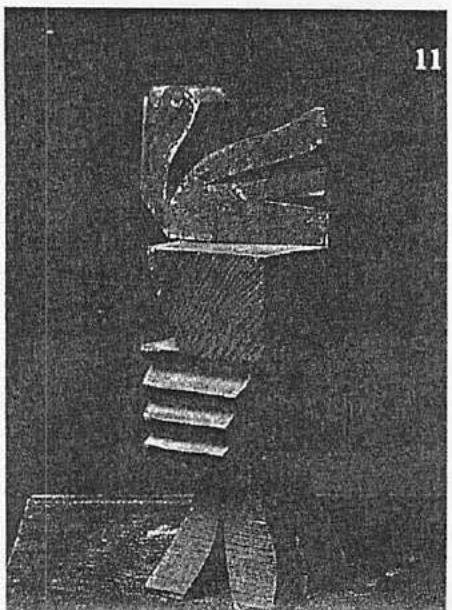
I made the first vertical pieces from a single piece of poplar. The challenge was to make a new structure with an internal coherency. I took a straight piece and started cutting triangles and flipping them over to develop a curve with strange legs.



11. Tiny Red and Blue, 1983

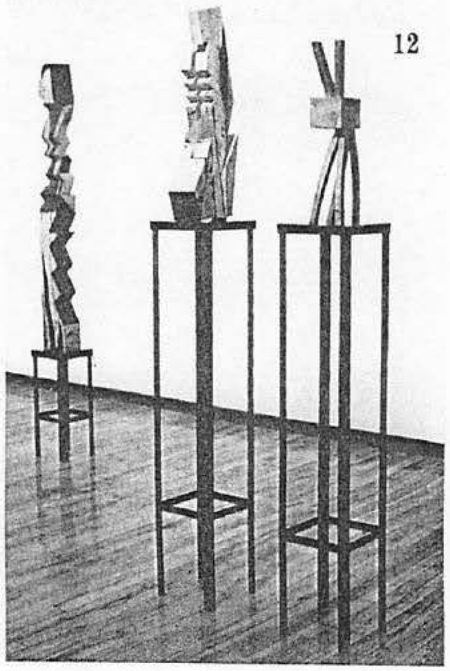
zebrawood with japan color, 10 by 4⅜ by 3⅛ inches

This one is a precursor of a series of three-legged pieces which I kept in my studio to look at. It has many anthropomorphic qualities and the coding of a blue exterior and a red interior. It is made of zebrawood. The main thing for me is that it was made so quickly that there was no conscious thought. But in order to cut the wood to work it on the band saw, I had to introduce clamped supporting pieces, so it became a combination of common fir with the far more exotic zebra. The japan color is an incredibly dense oil paint which contains far more pigment than is ordinarily considered necessary. It is a lead-based pigment also used as wood stain, and here I piled it on like an intense matte Yves Klein surface.



12. Installation works and pedestals, 1983

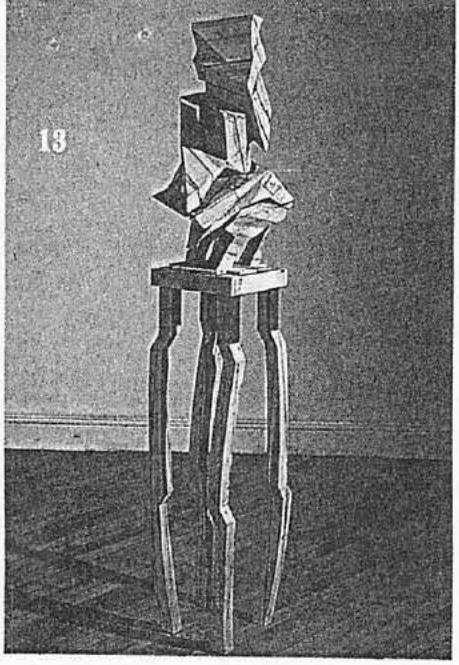
The raised platforms under the small works in this 1983 exhibition became like a water table. They changed my perception of what an object can be, of how an object can control the space around it. The platforms created an environment for the sculpture that was quite unfamiliar to me. I called them "stands," not "pedestals," to try to avoid the standard idea of a pedestal as a white plywood box. But the bases became part of the pieces. I had first tried to cast a concrete base because I thought it was more real or physical. Later, I just used blocks of wood. The sculptures emerged from a spontaneous bricolage activity, and the platforms were the active analytic complement forming a dynamic engagement with the sculpture.



13. Installation, 1985

layered poplar, 27½ by 13½ by 17 inches

Before my 1985 show at Weber I was rethinking the question of bases—wondering if there was the possibility of using the same wood for the base as for the piece itself, for instance. In these first works the gestures toward a baroque state were small. But as the bases became a plane which supported the piece, instead of just being "aquarium" frames, I changed the way I con-

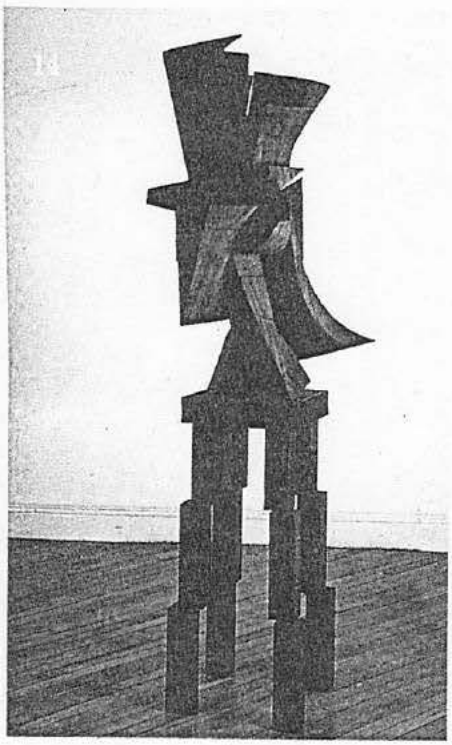


structed them. Instead of using vertical uprights I introduced diagonal supports which produced the look of a vector force. There was a clear distinction between the two parts, so there was also more structural energy right where they met.

14. Mahogany with Crude Oil and Lamp Black, 1985

43¾ by 27 by 19 inches

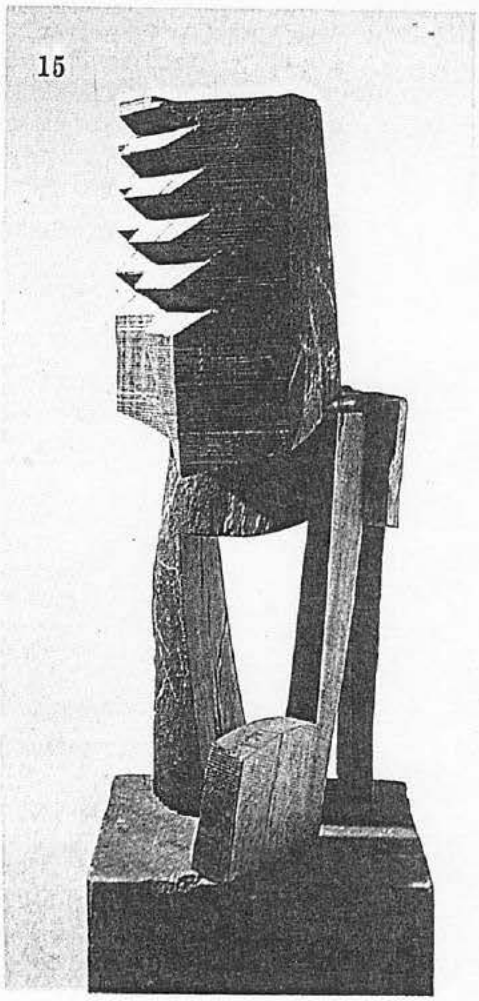
About the same time I also began to experiment with color. I got this wood that looked like nothing on the outside, or like simple weathered wood, and yet inside it had a charred-steak color. It was perfect to show structurally the difference between the exterior and interior.



15. Ebony with Three Legs, 1985

25 by 12 by 10¼ inches

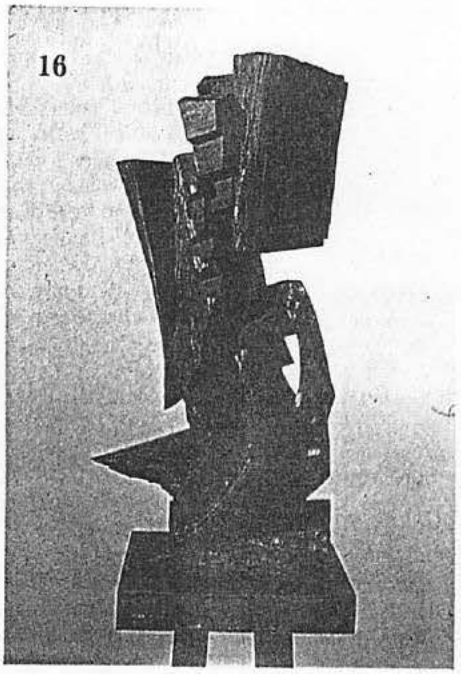
Ebony is so dense and moist that it is almost a nonwood, and carving it is like carving plastic. It's such a valuable wood that the bark is taken off and the timber itself covered with wax and sold by the pound in irregular-shaped logs rather than blocks. I took one of those masses and hoisted it up on a tripod. This is something I usually avoid, because a lot of modernist sculpture already sits on three points. An undeniable foot shape, which reminded me of Guston's imagery, produced an easy humor in this piece that defied a purely formalist interpretation. The work also had a back and front by virtue of its rough-log body versus its machine-cut face.



16. Rosewood with Bark, 1985

23 by 10 by 12 inches

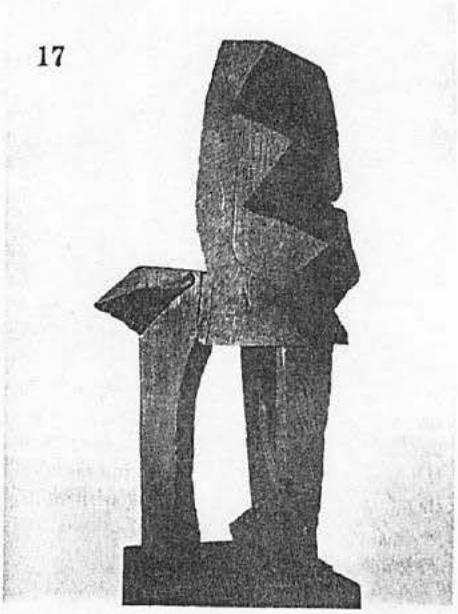
This piece was made at the same time as *Ebony with Three Legs*. Both were my forays into utilizing something that already existed in the tree. Until this time I had been pitting my work against the lumber mill, against the materials. With these two works, a dialogue started with the "natural." This particular sculpture is an example of the perversity involved in trying to make something "as close to nothing as possible."

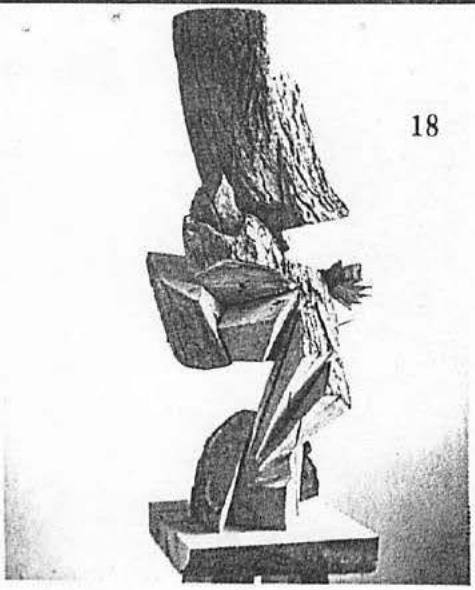


17. Black Walnut with Three Legs, 1986

47 by 23 by 10 inches

I was playing around with the chain saw because I felt there had to be some way to draw with a full body gesture as opposed to the movements afforded by the band saw. *Black Walnut with Three Legs*, on the other hand, was limited by the saw's inability to make curves and interlocking pieces. Instead, I cut primitive wedges—a crude geometry which mirrors the saw teeth. Then I sliced off three parts to make a tripod base and stood the whole thing up. It was dark, heavy, solid and ambiguous that way, with the mass held off the ground. I haven't been able to repeat it because I have no formula for working. I like it when I find a new way of working, but in this case when I tried to make another equally offhand piece, it wasn't the same.





18. Osage with Rays, 1987
39½ by 19 by 16 inches

Osage with Rays was also a chain-saw piece. Here I tried to make as much from nothing as I could. At the same time, the color of the wood was so strong that it was like cutting into pure yellow pigment. It was so yellow that I had a desire to overdo it: to make the base out of the same color, to make the whole sculpture totally yellow. I had just seen the Marin show and was thinking about the way he painted the frames of his pictures. I decided I wanted to put two similar structures up against each other.

19. Untitled (Vertical Walnut), 1987
83 by 25 by 21 inches

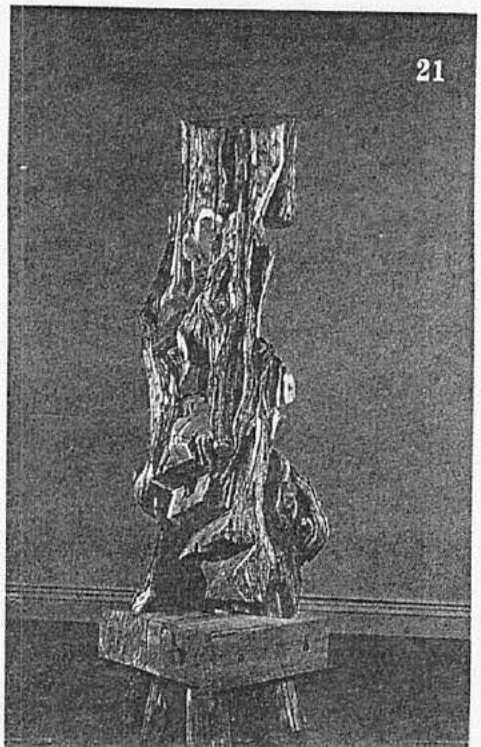
Making personal marks and making them meaningful on this larger scale is difficult. I was very unsure of this piece all the way through. Keeping the gestures necessary was making me anxious. In many ways, I've been dealing with that ever since. A number of earlier pieces had gotten stuck at the scale of a person, suggesting anthropomorphic representation. But finally none of those works are any more representational than the P.S. 1 piece was architectural. Moving the scale up to an uncomfortable or ominous size is interesting to think about.

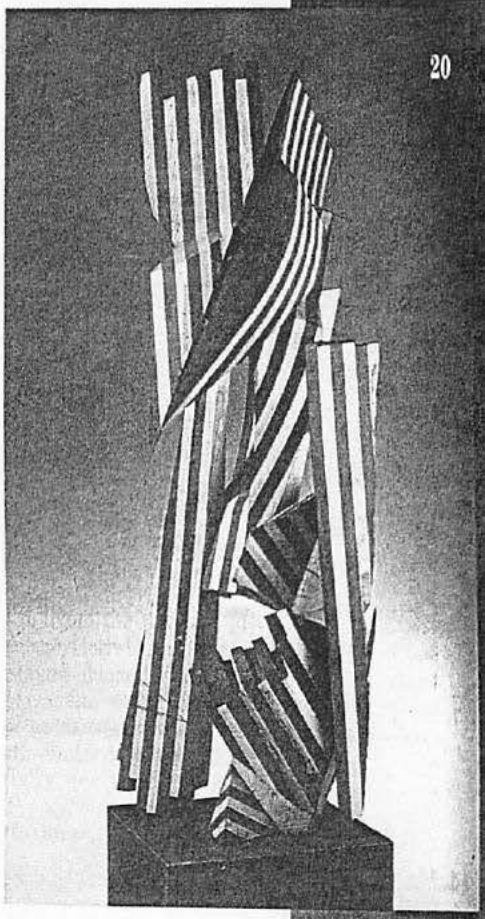
20. Striped Amaranth, 1988
52½ by 16 by 17½ inches

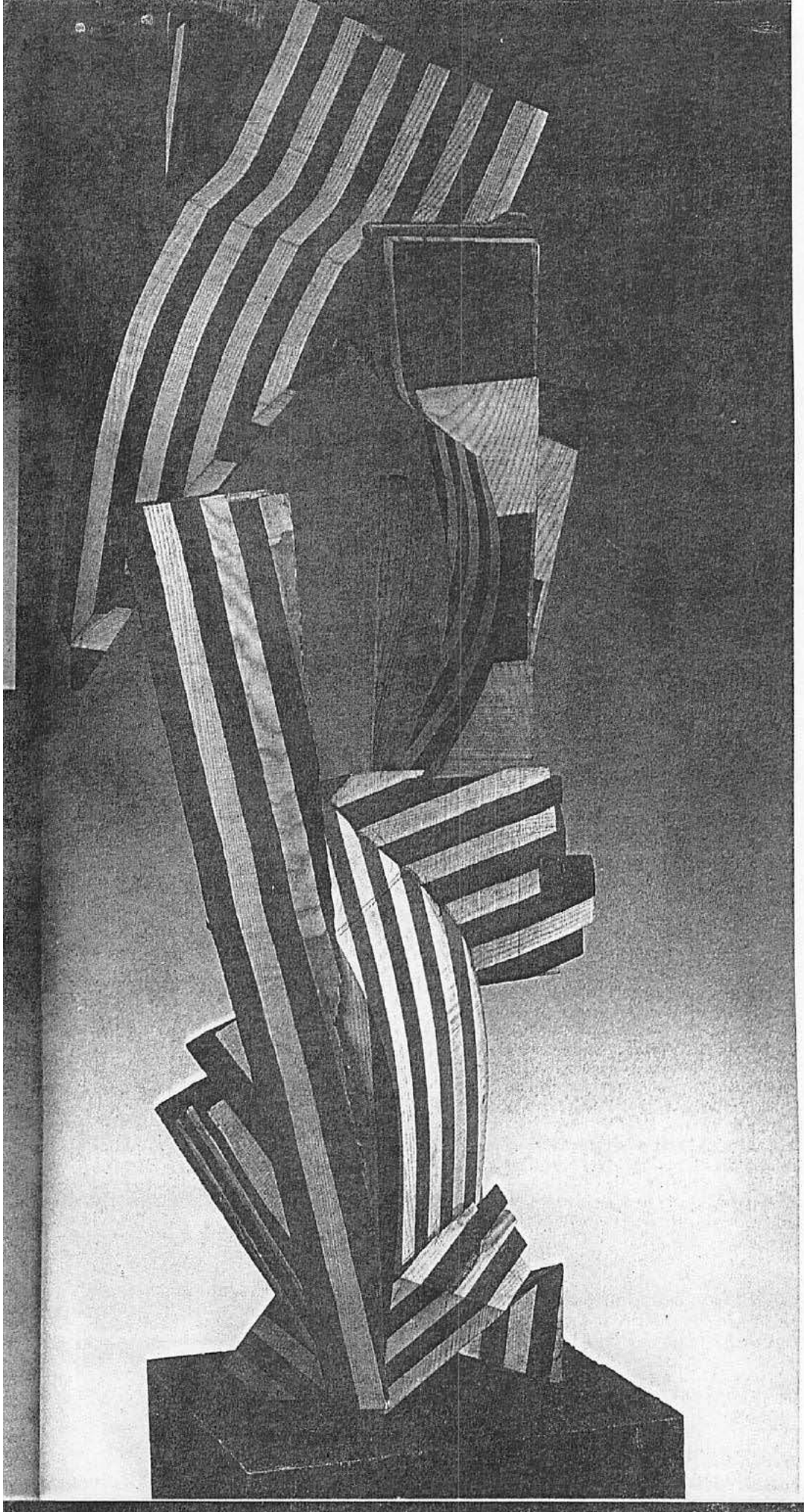
I have a recurring interest in the nonwood quality of certain woods. I often choose them for their "unnatural" qualities—say, a color that is not normally associated with wood. Striping is the most obvious or baroque way to give a coloration throughout the entire block of wood because it allows the material to reveal itself as I cut into it. One of the things I like the most here is that the work's dynamic axis is circular, even though the piece itself is vertical. It turns in on itself—in many different ways.

21. Big Tree, 1988
cedar, 83½ by 33 by 25½ inches

This is another study in seeing how little I could do and still come up with something. I showed it at the Margo Leavin Gallery in Los Angeles without a base because I liked the scale of it. But now, I've made one for it. The cedar log is on a base that is now supported by eight legs which seem to create the same mass below the log as it has above. Like *Black Walnut with Three Legs*, the log exists in a seemingly natural state, and the base gives it a structural geometric state. The base is a square which has a hole through the center. The eight rough logs underneath seem like a different version of the mass above, and they literally inscribe a circle. From bottom to top, it is a circle, a square and a log. As well, there is a kind of communication between the "natural" wood and the common lumberyard materials of the horizontal base.







After the Slide Show

Prior to living in New York, I got my entire understanding of current art through art magazines. After Smithson's *Mirror Travel in the Yucatan* was published, I was perfectly willing to let the "photo reality" be the total life of the work. When I first arrived in New York in 1971, I went to Hunter College for graduate studies in sculpture, and Tony Smith's course immediately forced you to get a loft and start to work. The works I made initially were inspired by Pop art—sewn sculptures, for instance—or else they used pipes and other industrial materials. I drew a large circle of chalk on the floor of my loft space, the same loft from which the photograph of *Acceleration of a Circle in the Street* (made of plaster dust) was shot, and also worked with simple construction materials such as one-by-two-inch wooden slats. I twisted and skewed temporary grids on the floor. Now I am able to acknowledge the degree to which this work was derivative and topical.

With the floor pieces, and even more with the floor/wall pieces, the results were a low sprawl. I did my master's thesis at Hunter on stone circles in England, including Avebury and other lesser sites. What was interesting about the smaller circles was that the stones were shin-high. Again, my knowledge was not from direct experience. But it was only from an aerial photograph that the complex geometry of these structures could be perceived. In my thesis I tried to pose the question of whether a monument could be horizontal.

In my first show at Artists Space, I leaned low panels against the wall—a direct response to those prehistoric circles. The horizontality was deliberately contrary to the vertical tradition of sculpture. They blurred the space between the floor and wall, or they joined them to create an *undefined* space. I began to use the emphatic narrowness of my loft to think about things attached to the wall. I was thinking two-dimensionally and trying to find a way into three dimensions. There had to be a way to make sculptures which were self-defining: a procedure parallel to what Rockburne and Ryman had worked out for painting. Minimalist sculpture seemed to be about partitioning architectural space, but the sculptural issues ended up being so subordinate to the architectural ones that it wasn't all that interesting to me. To find a system for making sculpture, then, I started with the plane or square and, taking one step at a time—lifting or tilting or swinging an edge, folding it in on itself—eventually produced a sculptural object.

The duality that I had relied upon in the earlier pieces—by emphasizing the juxtaposition of floor to wall, for example, or of the studio to the street—now became internalized in the "shelving" pieces. The cuts I made in these works and the colors that were revealed in the process did not indicate just another surface. They were also meant to suggest another emotional dimension. Moving further and further away from Minimalism, I was beginning to return to the idea of a unique object, as in the early work of Judd or

White Log,
1986, bronze,
25½ by 8 by 8 inches.

Andre. What was evolving as my primary interest was the idea of a system *not* working—the breakdown of a system. For me, when something doesn't work an opening is created. I was fighting the closed systems that were being developed at that time.

Sculpture competes for space with people and furniture. I don't feel that distant from architectural references, and I've made tables and chairs which are perversely unusable—tables without flat surfaces, chairs without seats. But a more direct necessity for me is that sculpture remain unusable. It still has to stand up, support itself, deal with gravity—its plot devices are visible. We see the world in relation to our body, and to make sculpture is to make objects that compete with us for those spaces in which we find ourselves. I view the huge, collaborative, site-specific sculpture projects that are fashionable now as copouts on the idea of sculpture itself.

An object takes its space with it, creates the space around it, does not rely on the space around it to be read. An object has its existence internally. Minimalism's common method was to define a given space and then present sculpture within it. All Minimalist sculpture is really a kind of three-dimensional patterning: breaking up the space of a room the way you might break up the plane of a painting, reorganizing the geometry of a room. For me, then, the acid test of sculpture became to put a number of sculptural works in a space without divisions. I was responding to the kind of perversity I sensed in Tony Smith's magazine article of the late '60s or early '70s about driving at night on the New Jersey turnpike—speculations about the possibility for new monuments, new sculptural experience; no more sculptures like postage stamps. It shows how short my personal history as an artist is that I accepted without question the implications of earthworks; what was meant to be radical had already become for me the norm. Ergo, for my generation, there was a need for a revised kind of radicality. When the avant-garde is the status quo, where do you go?

In some ways, my work in bronze clarifies what I'm doing because bronze exaggerates the natural, allowing an awareness of saw marks and wood grains. What can be seen as texture or line in the bronze version is still just sawed wood in the original. But this effect can vary from case to case. For instance, the ebony pieces, even though they are wood, have a density that seems greater than the bronzes'.

The hard thing about sculpture being so labor-intensive is that the actual making of the thing is so slow. You have to figure out how to keep up with your ideas, maintaining their immediacy in spite of the slowness of the work process. You're tempted to skip a step here or there, but you can't, because the making of something always leads you off in unexpected directions. You are always about three years behind what you're thinking about. Painters have made so much important sculpture because they aren't interested in the traditional processes, and they can make use of the medium more freely, just going directly to the effect they want.

The truth is, although I have a reputation for the use of exotic woods, I'm not in love with wood per se. For me, various woods are more about color or the differences offered by inside and outside. Part of making bronze works is a denial of wood, even if cast metal can accentuate some of the effects of wood. Wood presents a limited vocabulary, and the best way to change a work is by changing its most basic premise—that is, by shifting materials.

All my sculptures have moved from their origins in a geometric program to something more organic. Ironically, what I think of as my personal marks on the wood have become more geometric. As the forms get organic, what represents the human is more machined. Of course, the further nature is studied, the more that which is organic shows itself to be geometric; just look at the microscopic structure of living cells. Now my sculptures develop as a colony—like coral or mineral crystal—with a form growing from the center. The top and bottom are the last to develop.

Maybe all of what we call content is about memory; that would explain the way abstract work trips off a kind of preverbal recollection. As well, of course, there is a verbal memory—one learned in art history—and therefore, perhaps, there is something fundamental about the postmodern idea of quotation. I know there are references in my work to other sources, but that kind of quotation doesn't come from a conscious strategy, a formulaic way of thinking. It is the conscious memory which makes us self-conscious. But a lot of the way I use cultural memory is to go back to those strange points in art history where the work seems unfinished: I want to question arbitrary conclusions. □

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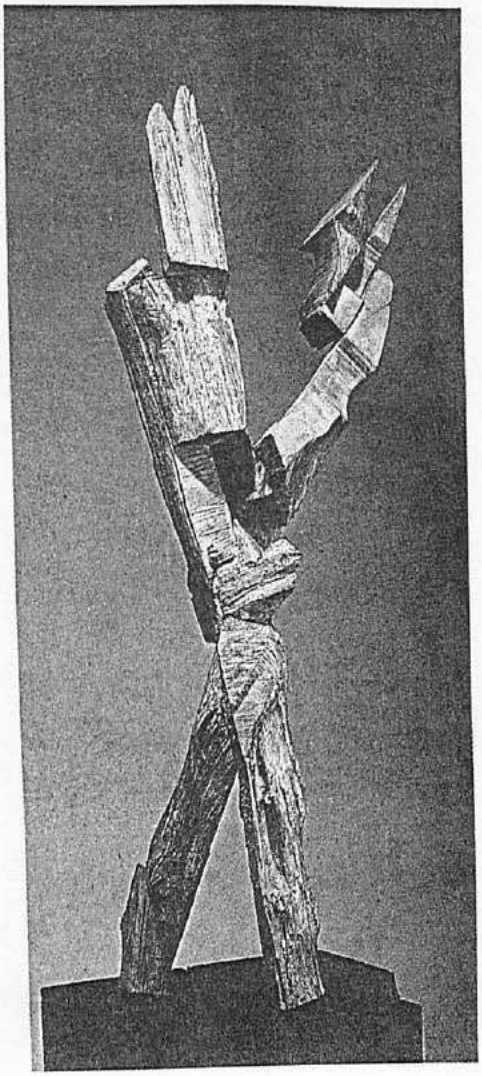

Cedar X,
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54 by 21 by 18 inches.

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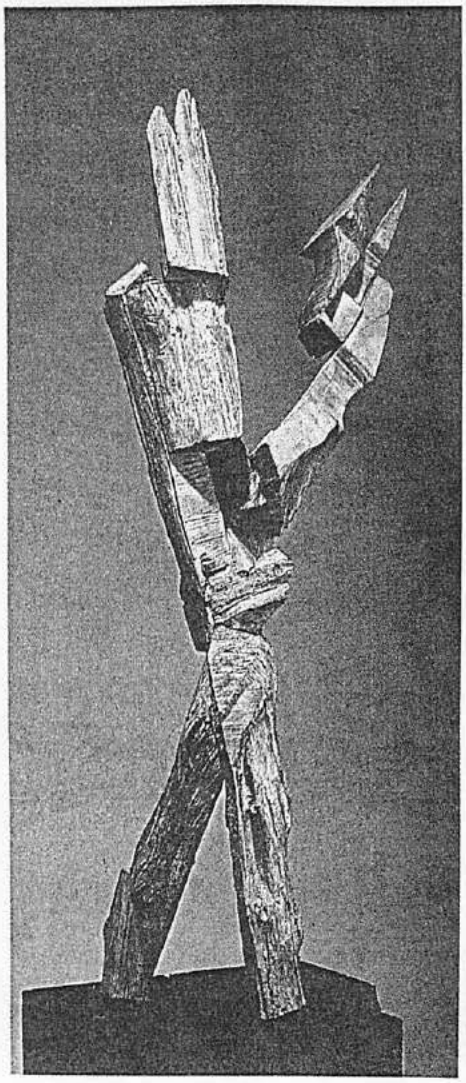

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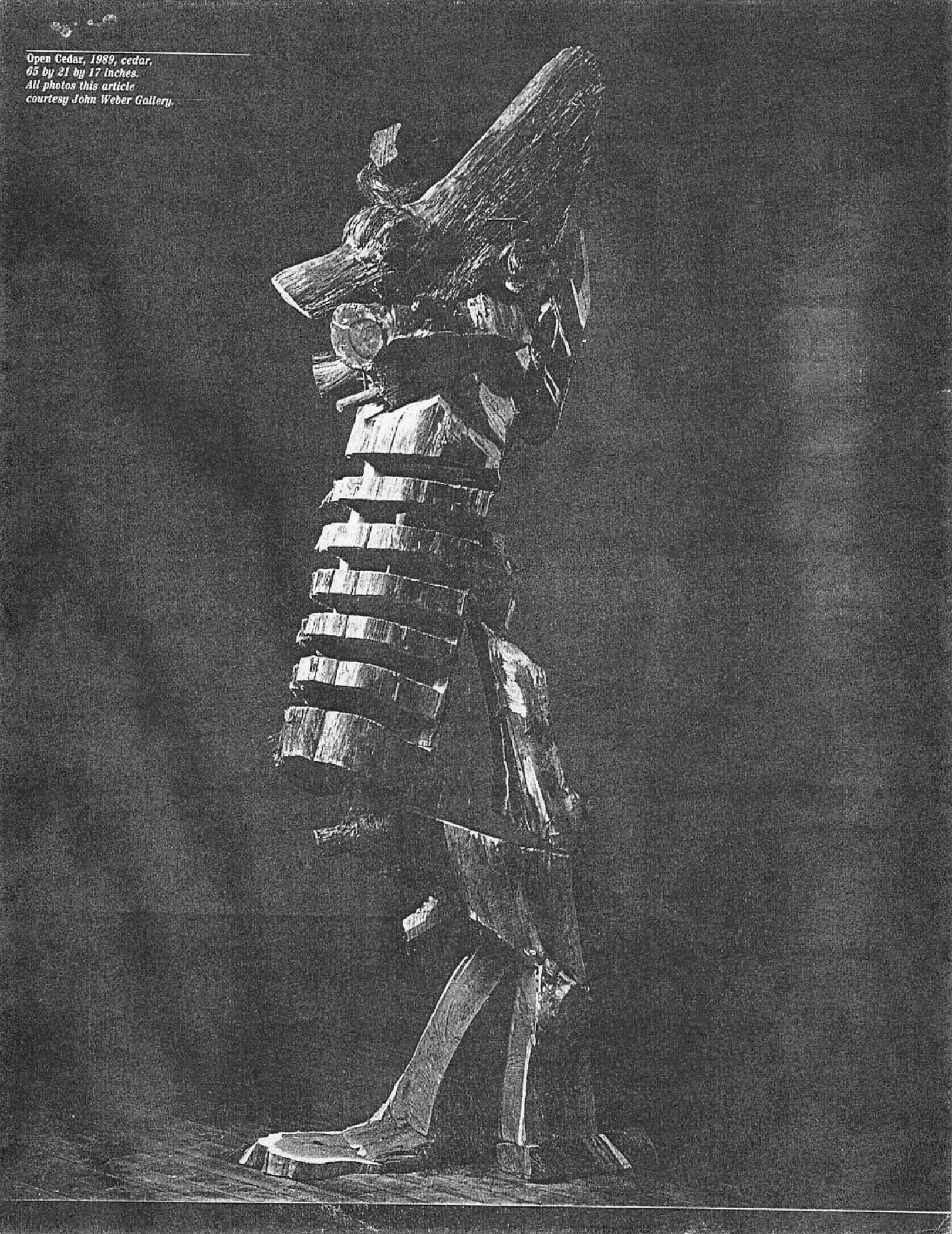

Open Cedar, *1989, cedar, 65 by 21 by 17 inches. All photos this article courtesy John Weber Gallery.*

The New York Times

Reviews/Art; Sculpture Shows at 2 Branches of the Whitney

By Michael Brenson
Dec. 22, 1989

"Out of Wood: Recent Sculpture," at the Whitney Museum of American Art at Philip Morris, underlines the continuing vitality of American wood sculpture. Raoul Hague, Jene Highstein, Mel Kendrick, Michael Lekakis and Ursula von Rydingsvard have different roots and different approaches, and they represent several generations. Yet all five sculptors work in a direct and highly physical manner, and they all want to offer an experience of fullness and enchantment.

"The Experience of Landscape: Three Decades of Sculpture," at the Whitney's downtown branch, at Federal Reserve Plaza, approaches nature from a distance. The 17 works on display by 12 artists - including stars like Carl Andre, Louise Nevelson and Robert Smithson and younger artists like Jennifer Bolande and Vikky Alexander - present a highly selective survey of the recent American sculptural interest in nature. Here, art and nature seem split, and a growing sense of the exploitation, loss and vulnerability of nature is a major concern.

The exhibitions reflect two very different curatorial approaches and two sides of contemporary art. "Out of Wood" was organized by Josephine Gear, the director of the Whitney's Philip Morris branch, who encourages sustained contact with individual works. Not all the wood sculptures can be appropriately seen in the huge sculpture court, and Ms. von Rydingsvard's "Lace Mountains," with its walls undulating like ancient Near Eastern reliefs, should have enough space behind it so that it can be viewed from all sides, but there is a real sensitivity to sculpture here and a real feeling for each work.

"The Experience of Landscape" is ruled by the post-modern gods of consciousness, context and appropriation. Organized by Karl Emil Willers, the director of the downtown branch, it is less an exhibition of artworks that have to be respected and revealed than an attempt to make the show itself an artwork in which everything is appropriated. The way the objects are installed, they seem little more than ideas, or specimens. Visitors are almost obliged to consider each work in the context of many others.

For example, standing in the middle of the rectangular space and looking at Mr. Andre's sequence of eight small concrete blocks, each with a round and smooth river stone on top of it (there is no sense whatever of the sweep or time succession of the original installation, which has 144 parts), you are aware of Michelle Stuart's pigmented scrolls

on one side, Nancy Graves's handmade bones on the other, and works by Robert Lobe, Bryan Hunt, Alan Saret, Meg Webster and Ms. Bolande farther along.

The exhibition levels everything. All the works, even those as meditative as Ms. Stuart's or as sculptural as Mr. Lobe's, seem equal and conceptual. The particular experience that each work has to offer does not matter. There is no sense that three-dimensional objects have to be treated differently from paintings or photographs. The clash between the white wood platform base of the Graves, the black wood platform base of the Nevelsons and the gray wood strip of floor supporting the Andre is horrible.

Yet the show has its strengths. It calls attention to the substantial involvement of American sculptors with landscape during the last 30 years and reminds us that before 1960 landscape was largely the domain of painting. It brings together works representing distinct approaches to nature, like Smithson's "Gravel Mirrors With Cracks and Dust," Mr. Saret's "Black Falls" and Mr. Lobe's "Facial Structure." And it suggests that a tradition has developed of an analytical sculptural approach to nature that could be the subject of a large exhibition. But these strengths are almost totally undermined by a disheartening presentation.

On one level, the show is silly. The checklist in the brochure includes works around New York City that have nothing to do with this show or the Whitney. One is the sculpture-architecture-design project by Mary Miss, Stanton Ekstut and Susan Child at the South Cove of Battery Park City. The only way this attempt to appropriate art outside the exhibition can succeed is if the show specifically addresses that art, which "The Experience of Landscape" does not.

The midtown show is coherent. All five sculptors are seriously involved with issues of volume and mass and the effect of the object on the space around it. All are fascinated by the expressive possibilities of wood, by its connection with the processes of nature and by its ability to provide a link with the history of magic and ritual.

Almost all of them feel that each tree has a particular identity that dictates what the work will be. Mr. Hague, born in Constantinople and at the age of 84 the dean of American wood sculptors, finds personalities in tree trunks and presents them as wrinkled torsos or decayed, ancient heads. Sometimes he almost seems to plumb the unconscious of a tree, ripping it open and exposing its interior life.

There are three works by each sculptor. Those of Mr. Lekakis (who died in 1987) hang from ropes from the ceiling of the sculpture court and suggest ribbons, snakes or the suspended bird and spine in Giacometti's "Palace at 4 A.M." Ms. von Rydingsvard cuts and assembles pieces of wood into architectural environments that seem both charmed and demonic.

Mr. Highstein's "Large Temple," a 14-foot-tall cedar cylinder, is the largest architectural sculpture in the show and an attempt to make a work that can be looked at, touched and lived in. But it has a literalness that Mr. Highstein's smaller 1989 temple (at Wave Hill last summer), which could not be entered except by a child, did not have.

Mr. Kendrick takes trees, cuts them up and reassembles them. The process is exposed; the sculptures refer to the histories of modern and wood sculpture. Mr. Kendrick's two

main sculptural problems - how to deal with the base, and how to avoid being so self-referential and artistically self-conscious that the work becomes academic - belong to the past. While he continues to insist upon consciousness, sculptures like "Mulberry on Oak Wedge" and "Open Cedar" have a quirky, shaggy, druidic power.

"The Experience of Landscape: Three Decades of Sculpture" remains at the Whitney Museum of American Art, Downtown, at Federal Reserve Plaza, 33 Maiden Lane, through March 2. The works in the gallery of the Whitney Museum of American Art at Philip Morris, 120 Park Avenue, at 42d Street, remain on display through Feb. 20; the works in the sculpture court are on display through December 1990.

"Open Cedar" by Mel Kendrick.

The New York Times

ART; Kendrick's Energetic Sculptures

By William Zimmer
March 5, 1989

LEAD: THE spotlight is on Mel Kendrick these days. In addition to "Essays," an exhibition of 16 small wood sculptures at the Lehman College Art Gallery, a wooden box of his from the 1970's, with slats that deviate from the straight and true, is a key piece in the survey of geometric abstraction at the Neuberger Museum at the State University of New York at Purchase.

THE spotlight is on Mel Kendrick these days. In addition to "Essays," an exhibition of 16 small wood sculptures at the Lehman College Art Gallery, a wooden box of his from the 1970's, with slats that deviate from the straight and true, is a key piece in the survey of geometric abstraction at the Neuberger Museum at the State University of New York at Purchase. And he is one of the four innovative sculptors featured in a major show at the Brooklyn Museum.

Mr. Kendrick deserves the attention. As "Essays" demonstrates, his work is captivating and challenging yet easily graspable. In her catalogue (the exhibition was originally at the Austin Arts Center at Trinity College in Hartford), Kate Linker writes, "if these works are 'about' anything they are about the maximum density of sculptural experience that can be achieved through a single form."

These sculptures are small if you size them up with a tape measure, but they radiate energy and the spectator often reflects that a larger version of any given piece would not provide an increase in that peculiar enjoyment called "sculptural experience."

What Mr. Kendrick gives us is many views in a single work. The works are made of interlocking pieces of wood that, as Ms. Linker succinctly states, "preserve their respective thrusts."

In the mid-1970's, when Mr. Kendrick came of age as a sculptor, the revelation of the process, a quality known as "truth to materials," was sought after. Mr. Kendrick puts wood, all kinds of wood, through its paces. It is made to curve or to assume sharp angles and be drilled in, or patterns of of dots or squares can be raised on it. It can be painted selectively or completely stained. Everywhere, drawn or wood-burned lines compete with the edges, and the cumulative energy is like that achieved by the Futurists but completely abstract.

It comes through in the Cibachrome "Group Photographs" taken by Mr. Kendrick and appended to the exibition. The pieces here and others seem to arrange themselves into families, making Mr. Kendrick a proud papa showing his snapshots. (To March 18.) "In the Blood," at the Longwood Arts Gallery of Bronx Council on the Arts, at 1738 Hone Avenue in the South Bronx, demonstrates nimbly at times how African influences show up in the work of black American artists. Work by 14 artists from seven countries is here, but only the two Nigerian artists still live in Africa. All the rest, including a Panamanian, live in the United States. When one's eye has worked its way through the welter of color and form that is this show, the conclusion is that the artists who have assimilated the African influence with the most imagination and flair are Willie Coles and Bisa Washington. Both are showing up frequently in group shows in New York, Connecticut and New Jersey.

Mr. Coles displays a vertical wall sculpture made of wood slats pointed at the ends, entitled "Within, Without." Bicycle wheels are at the top and bottom of this piece, but a standby of modern sculpture, a rusted bicycle seat, is fixed over a reproduction of a plump pink body painted by Rembrandt; the skull-shaped seat takes the place of the painted head, making for a rich enigma. Mr. Coles's other piece has "dog eat dog" scrawled over it numerous times and the dogs in question are made of rusted nails bunched close together for an especially bristly feeling.

Ms. Washington's matrix is matted lengths of black and red woven fiber, but in this tangle is a prayer card showing St. Michael the Archangel beating the devil. This would be a composite of Western and so-called primitive fetish objects, yet dangling from the fiber are some ordinary house keys, used - one supposes - to keep the devil from paradise.

The comparison that is the purpose of the exhibition is set up best by a painting by the Nigerian Saheed Pratt. With clear colors and black outline, this painting on canvas resembles a batik. Next to this is a drawing made using marker pens, by Winston Gittens of the Bronx, which is like a riff of Mr. Pratt's more hieratic composition.

It is universally acknowledged that jazz is a fusion of African and Western elements, and Abstract Expressionist painting is often the visual equivalent of jazz. A print made of exuberant flecks of ink by a Moroccan artist, Mohammad Khalil, and a portrait by Noah Jemison in which the figure is outlined in black and white, are examples of this visual jazz. But right to the point is a sugary pink music box with male and female symbols by Arturo Lindsay of Panama. The music is a jazz work by Butch Morris and the music sounds fine as it is translated into music-box tones, (Through March 11.)

One feels sure the paint or the lines are not modes of decoration. They are more plain-spoken than decoration; they are demonstrations. Yet as vehicles for the various processes that wood can undergo, there is nothing prosaic about the work. The pieces have life and personality.

One feels especially partial to the bantam-size "Tiny Red and Blue" (most of the pieces are named after the wood they are made from, their colors or the chief operation performed on them), because of the cleft on what would be its head. Many have wooden tufts that endow them with flair and vital personality. The oddly named "Zircote and Padouk" seems to strut, and the blue of "Blue Basswood" is the French blue of Gauloises cigarette packs. This color tames an otherwise pugnacious piece that has abundant cuts and drawn lines.

In tying in Mr. Kendrick's esthetic with Futurism or Cubism, one is also referring to African sculpture, which exerted a great influence on artists at the beginning of this century. This is work that does not seek to imitate African sculpture and its weight of symbolism. The process, or "truth to materials," aspect works against this. But in its basic desire to state truths, hear truths about wood, the affinity is there.

ART

: Sculptures

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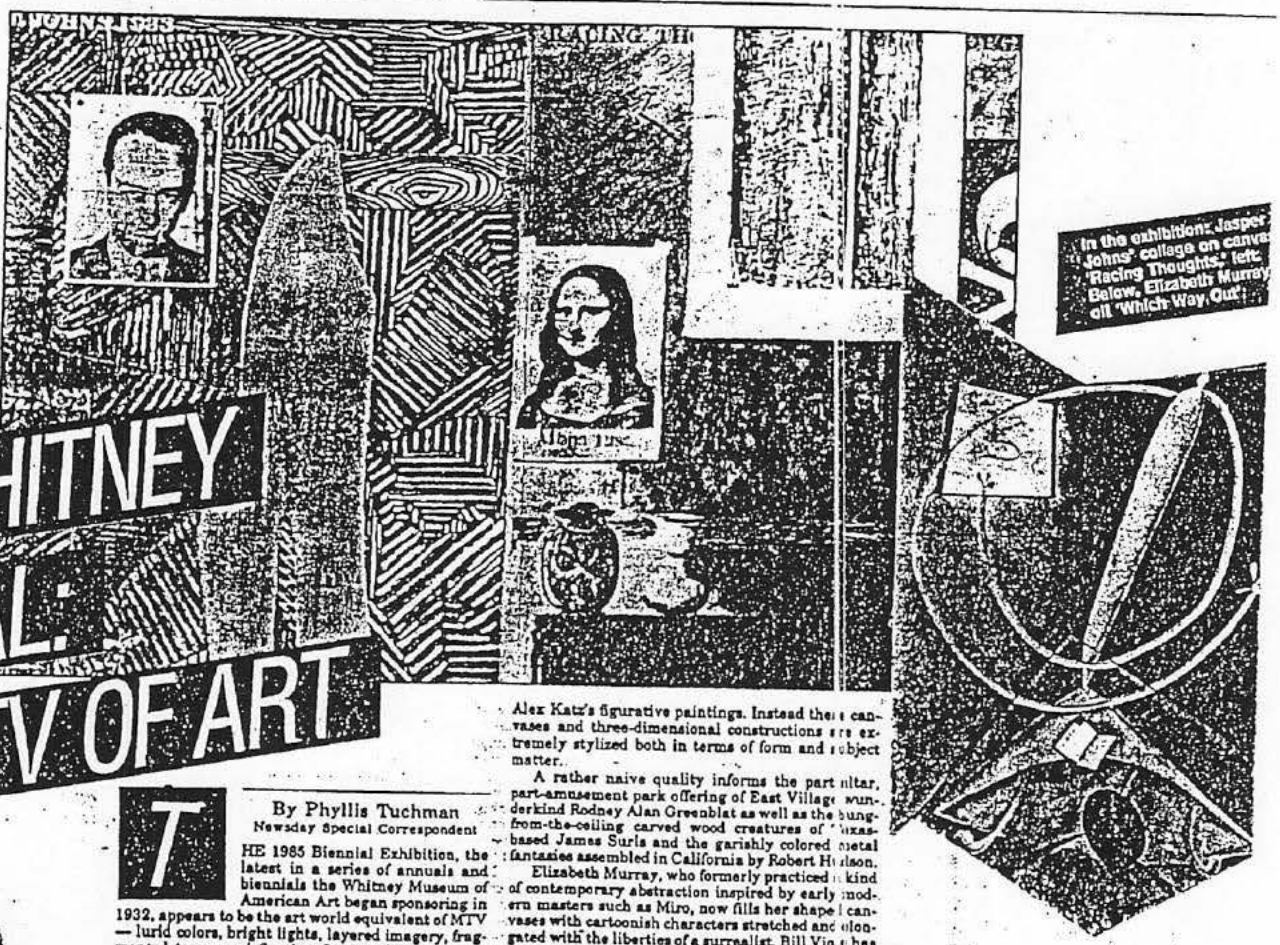
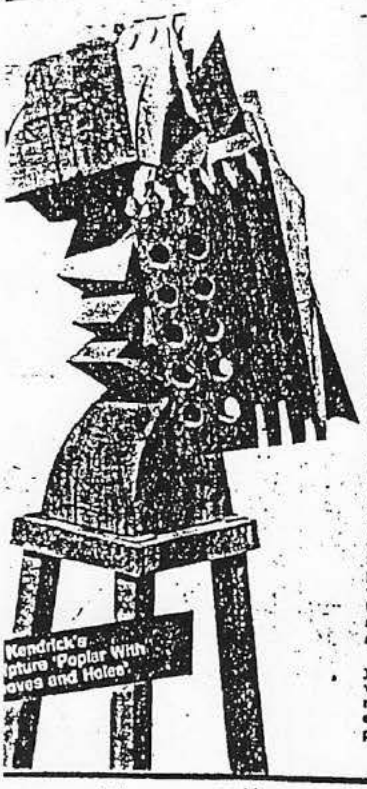
"Drilled Poplar, Shellac" and "Zircote and Padouk," right, by Mel Kendrick.

THE WHITNEY BIENNIAL: THE MTV OF ART



In the exhibition: Jasper Johns' collage on canvas 'Racing Thoughts,' left. Below, Elizabeth Murray's oil 'Which Way Out.'



Kendrick's sculpture 'Poplar With Leaves and Holes'

By Phyllis Tuchman
Newsday Special Correspondent

THE 1985 Biennial Exhibition, the latest in a series of annuals and biennials the Whitney Museum of American Art began sponsoring in 1932, appears to be the art world equivalent of MTV — lurid colors, bright lights, layered imagery, fragmented torsos and floating figures abound.

This year, more than 140 paintings, sculptures, installations, photographs, films and videos are on view. Most of the 84 artists live and work in New York; one-third are based elsewhere in the United States, primarily in California.

Grumblings about who was included and who was not are being expressed by art professionals at dinner tables and at cocktail parties. But the exhibition should prove extremely popular with the public.

An aura of fantasy is prevalent. A fair number of works are laden with consciousness-raising themes. Twenty years ago, art lovers thought they needed courses in mathematics, philosophy and psychology to fully appreciate the then-new cool art. Erudite words and batteries of footnotes were used to explain what became known as minimalism. This show reveals how drastically the scene has changed. Acres of canvases, flickering monitors and flashing lights suggest art has become big-time entertainment.

And although it was assembled by committee, the 1985 biennial actually is one of the most unified exhibitions of this type the Whitney has mounted. During the '60s, when painting annuals alternated with sculpture annuals, a mix of older artists, artists in mid-career and young talent was blended together. The most recent biennials were melanges, reflecting the smattering of styles considered to be representative of the pluralistic nature of the art world of the '70s and early '80s. This year, the curatorial staff of the Whitney heartily endorses representational art, although a sprinkling of abstract sculptures has been included as well.

A new kind of image is encountered wherever you turn. Although you can recognize things, you would never confuse what you are looking at with realistic art. Nor do the works in this show have either the reductive clarity associated with the giant portraits of Chuck Close or the suave demeanor of Alex Katz's figurative paintings. Instead these canvases and three-dimensional constructions are extremely stylized both in terms of form and subject matter.

A rather naive quality informs the part guitar, part-amusement park offering of East Village wunderkind Rodney Alan Greenblat as well as the hung-from-the-ceiling carved wood creatures of Texas-based James Surls and the garishly colored metal fantasies assembled in California by Robert Hudson.

Elizabeth Murray, who formerly practiced a kind of contemporary abstraction inspired by early modern masters such as Miro, now fills her shaped canvases with cartoonish characters stretched and elongated with the liberties of a surrealist. Bill Viola has created a dream-like installation with a fallen tree whose branches are filled with blinking bulbs while a series of random views are projected against the back wall of his room.

Artists such as David Wojnarowicz, another East Village art-scene star, and Robert Yarber, who maintains studios in Austin, Texas, and Oakland, Calif., contribute canvases with figures and settings that call to mind science-fiction movies (the former) and Hollywood panoramas (the latter).

The seductive painterly surfaces of Jasper Johns and Eric Fischl, a highly touted 36-year-old, are packed with sexual overtones: Johns slyly depicts bathtub faucets as surrogates for male anatomy, while Fischl more blatantly treats erotic themes. The bright colors and truncated imagery of pattern and decoration painters Robert Kuschner and Kim MacConnel allow these artists to look astonishingly comfortable in the 1985 biennial.

There is even a kind of narrative abstraction developed with fragmented forms and rich hues by Gregory Amenoff, Carroll Dunham and Terry Winters that suggests that for the first time in more than a decade a unified style informs much art currently being made.

Among the best works are two canvases by Susan Rothenberg and sculptures by Mel Kendrick and Bryan Hunt. They're more reserved, quieter and more subtle than other pieces in this show. They're almost old-fashioned. Rothenberg paints with skills; Kendrick places his sculptures on pedestals; Hunt casts his work in bronze. Having learned from both the near and distant past, they are all radically reinterpreting conservative practices with liberal policies. They have, for example, endowed their art with a sense of discovery in terms of detail and nuance.

The 1985 biennial makes it clear that the present decade is concerned with transformations — with images in a state of flux. We're witnessing the emergence of a more effusive, ornate neo-baroque manner that distances us more and more from the classical tenor of the '60s. There are not a lot of new trends, although the attitude of the moment could itself be called trendy.

Before this show opened, a lot of people wondered how it would hold up without the inclusion of the neo-figurative artists who are German and Italian. It does. Another segment of the art world thought the exhibition might be overrun by East Village painters and sculptors. It isn't. However, the East Village esthetic has spread wider than anyone suspected.

ACCORDING to the text in the catalog, "Younger artists have been chosen for their introduction of new forms and ideas; more established artists because their work has shown consistent growth and has advanced substantially during the last two years." Thus, a bit of misconception is perpetuated by this exhibition: The Whitney show does not include a number of contemporary masters who emerged during the '50s and '60s and who are still painting and making sculptures that deserve attention.

But instead of arcane criticism, a more typical response to the 1985 biennial seems to be the sort of comment overheard as a punk-coiffed, natty dressed teenager walked out of an installation occupying a corridor, the rest rooms and the pay telephone booths decorated by graffiti artist Keith Scharf. To her friend, she remarked, "Totally awesome."

The Whitney Biennial is on view through June 9 (the second floor) and June 9 (the fourth floor, the lobby gallery and the lower gallery). ■

THE NEW YORK TIMES, FRIDAY, APRIL 15, 1983

Sculpture: Mel Kendrick

By VIVIEN RAYNOR

A YOUNG sculptor who originally comes from Boston, Mel Kendrick makes some of his contemporaries look as if they were just pumping iron, esthetically speaking. Where they aspire to the grandiose in noble and industrial materials, he works concisely, small and for the most part in wood. Few of the pieces in the artist's show at John Weber, 142 Greene Street, are more than three feet tall and all are mounted at eye level on metal stands. They are, moreover, more closely related to Cubism and tribal art than to later-20th-century movements. Earlier in his short career, though, Mr. Kendrick was practicing a romantic kind of Constructivism, and he is also appearing in a group show called "New Biomorphism and Automatism" at the Hamilton Gallery, 20 West 57th Street.

Stressing what an artist is not could be interpreted as faint praise, but in this case, these "negative" attributes are not the result of willfulness, nostalgia or fogeydom. The opposite is true, for Mr. Kendrick is very much a child of his time; his apparently casual technique is a large part of his work's message as well as of its fascination. Using a power saw, he cuts shapes from small beams and planks, joining them with glue and the occasional dowel.

The routine, however, doesn't necessarily go in that order. Often the artist will join the members before carving a shape out of them — a series of steps, for example. He will also remove a form, only to put it back in a slightly different position or to add it to some other part of the composition. In short, each piece is a sum of many angled and rounded elements abutting on one another at different slants. The general effect is of small architectural fantasies, now and again with overall twists and thrusts faintly suggestive of torsos, and the less intricate works are quite totemlike.

It's an accretive process that could go on forever, and to the extent that this is true and that the sculptures on their spindly pedestals are as effective clustered together as they are alone, Mr. Kendrick could be counted an automatist. But he knows when to stop — and when to enhance a piece by chalking geometric designs on its smooth faces or by painting them, say, black and leaving the hacked-out parts raw.

Jon Abbott

"Untitled," wood sculpture by Mel Kendrick, at John Weber Gallery.

The one bronze, a startling splash of green oxide among the wood, is a beauty on its own smooth terms. It's a small box poised on four bowed legs, which, like the V-shape antenna on top, are square in section. This piece aside, Mr. Kendrick's art looks offhand but is in fact complex almost to the point of craziness, Piranesi-style. The show, which closes tomorrow, should not be missed.

ART FORUM
SEPT. 1983

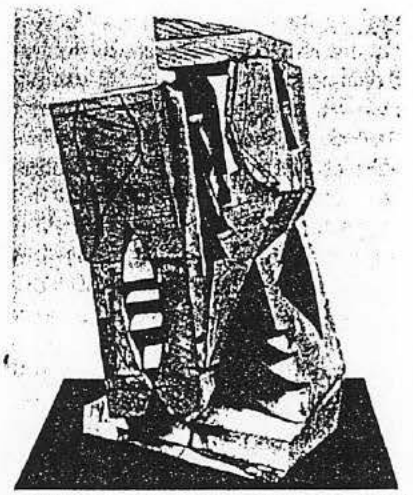
MEL KENDRICK

Mel Kendrick's new sculptures introduce a number of elements alien to contemporary sensibilities: on one hand, the pedestal; on another, direct hand-carving; and in a third instance, surface drawing and marking, with all their connotations of pictorialism. These elements, however, are not employed for their nostalgic intimations, but as artistic means among other means, as devices that have been devalued, at this point in late-20th-century culture, to the level of the functional services they perform. Instead, these works tread significant and relatively unexplored terrain in the role they accord to the spectator.

The sculptures are mostly small wooden works made of planks that have been sketched and sawed into irregular patterns. Glue and wooden dowels secure separate lengths, making angular, multifaceted structures which appear to twist and turn in different directions, and which require that the viewer walk around them to apprehend their total shapes. The pedestals themselves are no-nonsense, linear, metal structures which position the pieces at eye level, permitting the viewer to observe the diversity of surface and interior incident and the plays on repeating and opposing forms. For the wood has been worked with jagged sawtooth sequences and looping fluid curves, with interior ladder-like formations and space-admitting holes. These forms play contrapuntally over the sculptures, leading the viewer on through the rhythm of their articulation, as angular and fluid elements alternate, repeat, invert themselves, or are echoed in analogous forms. Superposed drawn lines supplement the initial sketching, along with variegated painted shapes. Multiple plays are, again, implicit, as drawn and incised lines (the mark of sawing) often read equivocally, and as the painted marks may read as illusionistic wooden knots or as imposed forms. The result is that these structures, with their quirky, shifting configurations and surfeit of visual forms, seem impossible to grasp as a whole.

This fugitive quality, which eludes precise definition, has parallels in the appeals made to the viewing imagination. For these works evoke a variety of allusions, both independently (as separate structures) and within the individual configurations. They appear totemic, biomorphic, and anthropomorphic at odds; one may appear like a head—a portrait—but then shifts with its references to structural stairs. And a parallel effect is secured in the range of historical allusions, as Cubism, Futurism, and primitivism are alternately invoked, along with welded, constructed works. The result is that these sculptures both affirm and defeat their materiality: they point toward the viewing experience as more than "purely visual," just as they point toward the viewer as the producer of the referent. In the way they engage contemporary critical issues, these allusive, elusive and formally stunning works have a central sculptural power.

—KATE LINKER



Mel Kendrick, untitled, 1982, wood, 17¼ × 9 × 7½".