

Flash Art

January - February 2012

JASON MIDDLEBROOK DODGE- NEW YORK



Like abandoned totem poles, the wood-based sculptures that comprise Jason Middlebrook's first solo exhibition at Dodge mostly lean against the broad white walls like the planks that they are. He turns a simply serviceable object into an example of nature as a source for abstract form, marrying its original silhouette and texture to a series of colorful and evocative markings that accrue the potential for esthetic enjoyment.

In *Once again a version of nature through my eyes* (2011), Middlebrook turns a randomly selected silhouette into a metaphorical rendition on the nature of wood. In its simplicity of line and its denial of illustration it brought to mind the early white-and-black line paintings of Frank Stella; but there is a visual heaviness in the raw surface. A plank becomes a seismic map of time as recorded in the pulp of the wood itself.

Vertical Landscape Painting (2011) possesses a certain feminine grace as it reaches gracefully from root to branches from which one can trace the structure of its growth. Middlebrook has matched this one with symbols that suggest cosmic or molecular motion, a sequence of linked diamonds over a hush of

spiraled lines, all of them in the black and green shades of a Malachite stone. These simple forms, immanently drawn, throb from within the imagined spirit of the tree.

Finding Square (2011) is perhaps the most intentionally constructed. Four planks have been cut and beveled to form a square with a center that is delineated by the rough bark normally associated with the exterior of a tree. Between the bark and the outer edge are a series of straight red lines that look like they are echoing the force of an event which, unseen by human eyes, is taking place in symbolic rather than real space.

The forest is a place of symbols, and in Freudian language, it is the origin of innocence, where we return to be born again. Middlebrook's planks resolve to be symbols for an en masse forest, where we discover what content really means.

David Gibson

JASON MIDDLEBROOK, *Black and White #2*, 2011. Acrylic on wood plank, 305 x 46 x 5 cm. Courtesy the artist and Dodge, New York. Photo: Karen Pearson.