

New American Paintings

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Composing and Compositing for Reactions: Cordy Ryman By Brian Fee

Scraps and discarded wood become remarkable, contemplative creations in Cordy Ryman's hands. His style bears some influence of dad Robert—connoisseur of white tones and alchemist with mounting implements—but Cordy is more likely to coat his second- or thirdhand lumber with dazzlingly colorful paint. Or he'll leave the wood bare to highlight its recycled history. Viewing Ryman's work, his relief-like paintings and painterly sculptures, in his second solo exhibition at Lora Reynolds Gallery is best done up close and personal.

Case in point with the sublime *Green Book*, which in photographs appears to be “just” a painting, though the sharp shadow beneath it hints there is more going on than meets the eye. I consider myself seasoned to Ryman's oeuvre after viewing several solo exhibitions at DCKT Contemporary on Manhattan's Lower East Side, but *Green Book* still caught me by surprise. A wave of green chevrons flood leftward in a tight pattern, acrylic and enamel shades ranging from milky pea soup to Schwarzwald darkness. If it wasn't for the textural mix, as if sawdust or the wood's splintery dermis abraded the painted surface (and the obvious hand-painted quality), *Green Book* might recall Frank Stella's pinstriped canvases. Only, its right side extends elegantly outward from the wall like the thick spine of a three-ring binder, revealing bolt-like slabs of painted wood screwed into the interior structure.

Green Book's “bolts”, the inner machinations of this painting-relief hybrid, echo Ryman's *Waiting for Christopher*, its 23 thumb-sized pastel-painted pieces creeping up DCKT's corner. He retains that verticality and illusion of moment here with *10-year Bar*, its icy hues pulling a B-Boy's “worm” down the wall. The press release relates *10-year Bar* to Donald Judd's stacked geometries, though I'd go as far to rank it with Anne Truitt's *Totems*, particularly in the pale coloration. I see Judd most in the wonderful *Hot Boxes*, three cinderblock-like wooden forms, edged in a checkerboard of cool blues and etched in the corners by massive staples. Ryman painted the interiors fluorescent tangerine or hot pink, causing their proximity to the white wall to radiate “hot” shadows. Judd outfitted brightly colored Plexiglas (or enamel-on-aluminum) panels within his sedate plywood or aluminum boxes: an unexpected, whimsical flourish within austere architecture. That *Hot Boxes* creates simultaneously a visual flicker like Dan Flavin's fluorescent bars is an added Minimalist meta-reference.

Ryman hasn't sacrificed his inventive tenacity for recycling “waste materials”. His go-to adhesive Gorilla Glue claims one big appearance in this exhibition, forming the gooey base to *Bench Chips*. The glue pulls double duty as muscular fixative and tree sap analogue, floating a found wood- chip hodgepodge over a base of acidic violet acrylic paint. He is even more successful compositionally with *Stir Sticks*, converting a tight stack of the titular utilitarian object, each partially kissed by vivid enamel or acrylic coating, into an rainbow geometric abstraction.

The white-painted backing of *Stir Sticks*, *Green Book's* total surface coverage, and *Strip Line's* surprising yellow edges exemplify his tight compositional ethos. As Ryman said in a late 2008 Brooklyn Rail interview: “When the sides are painted or accounted for in some way, it makes the piece as a whole seem more like a thing or an independent entity as opposed to a picture of something. Each move you make within a piece, if it has a satisfying effect, becomes like another word in a language or letter in an alphabet. It becomes part of a greater vocabulary.” In person, it is an excellent idea to engage Ryman's work from all angles.

Cordy Ryman grew up in a family of artists—mother Merrill Wagner, father Robert Ryman, and brothers Ethan and Will. He has exhibited widely nationally and internationally at institutions including the Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art (KS) and MoMA PS1 (NY). Ryman's work is in public collections including the Speyer Family Collection (NY) and the Museum of Contemporary Art (FL). His exhibition in Lora Reynolds Gallery's project room runs through October 20.

Brian Fee is an art punk currently based in Austin, TX. His culture blog *Fee's List* covers his three loves (art, film, live music) occurring in his other three loves (the Lone Star State, the Big Apple, and Tokyo).



Cordy Ryman, *Green Book*, 2012, acrylic and enamel on wood, 24 x 20 x 6-1/2 inches