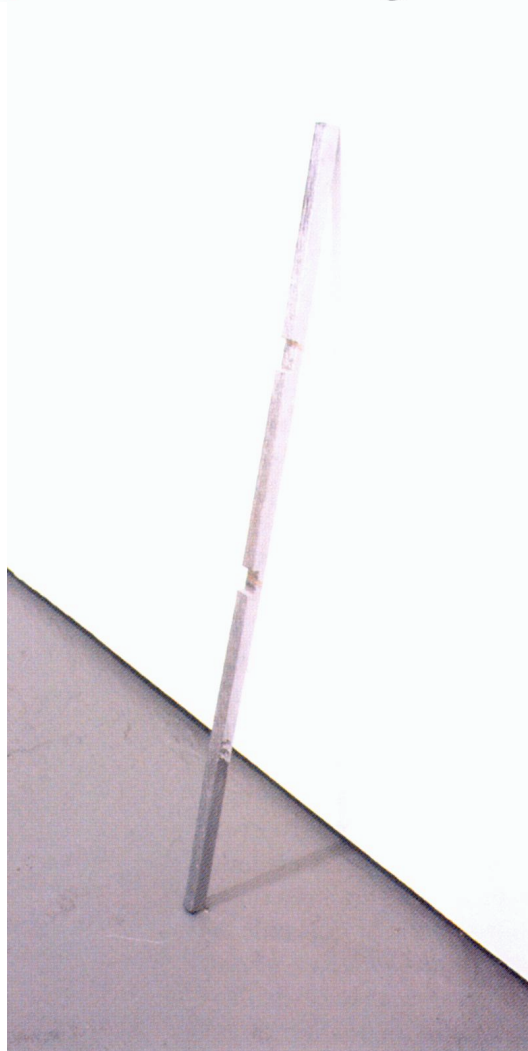


Carl Suddath

VAN HARRISON GALLERY

The outward modesty of Carl Suddath's enterprise might suggest a reluctance to experiment quite as dangerous, for a young artist, as its overreaching antithesis. Most of the works in Suddath's recent New York solo debut are untitled, and their materials, size, color, and manner of installation uniformly unassuming. But it is in Suddath's restraint that his work's measured strength resides. Using nothing



more exotic than wood and plastic, lacquer and ink, he has begun to develop a practice that can shift without lurching, insist without demanding, and endear itself without screaming to be liked.

The installation design of “New Drawing + Sculpture” (Suddath’s modesty extended to his exhibition’s deadpan moniker) mirrored the satisfying clarity of its component parts. Ranged around the newly established gallery’s compact interior were twelve wall- and floor-mounted constructions and framed works on paper, all from 2005 except for one triptych, *La Combe*, from 2004. While none of these are representational, all echo real-world images or objects in a way that runs counter to the initial impression they convey, which is of a kind of Minimalism-after-the-fact. One piece in baby blue-painted wood, for example, suggests a deckchair frame or clotheshorse but stops short of literal portrayal and remains stylistically consistent with its neighbors.

finishes, conspire to engender a somewhat nursery-like feel—more primary school than “Primary Structures.” A small steel and MDF box leaning across a rear corner of the room suggests a giant Lego brick, while a wall-mounted pair of smooth-faced maple slabs could be the interlocking pieces of a puzzle. Even the most substantial sculpture in the show, an L-shaped piece of MDF and plastic on a calf-high yellow pedestal, is evocative of childhood, resembling a section of fencing salvaged from an outsized model railway.

Suddath draws with discipline, using color sparingly and line in deliberate but nonetheless appealing ways. A quiet storm of clustered dots and strokes in brown marker on cream-colored paper that was hung low near the gallery entrance formed a neat pairing with a smaller square of wood-grain-like stripes across the room. *Fear of Death* takes a different tack, its faint, wavering sketch of something that seems as though it should be readable as an image—but isn’t quite—evoking the final marks of an expiring artiste. All have the feeling of being things—interesting things—in their own right, rather than mere representations, allusions, or references.

A set of three more drawings, the aforementioned triptych *La Combe*, was hung over the gallery’s reception desk. Flanking a panel of uninflected egg-yolk yellow are two careful colored pencil and india ink studies of what look like architectural forms—intersections of beams, planks, or scaffolding. This too was intelligently placed; more strongly colored and closer to a straightforward depiction than the rest of the show, it benefited from the slight remove. Such sensitivity to the ideational implications of physical combination and recombination has been a consistent feature of Suddath’s practice: His last solo exhibition, at the University of Illinois at Chicago’s Gallery 400 in 2004, was explicitly presented in terms of the designation as well as the occupation of space, suggesting a forum that might be both interactive and reflective.

A small rod of chrome-plated bronze perhaps best exemplifies the set of potentialities with which Suddath toys. Leaning casually against a wall, it suggests a spirit level or ruler, one tool among many for measurement and planning, looking and making.

—Michael Wilson