

MEL KENDRICK



Mel Kendrick makes art that explores the act of making and remaking, and the ideas that evolve in this simple yet sophisticated pursuit. For over thirty years, a continuing commitment to investigating process has motivated him to cut, saw, drill, mark, color, fasten, stack, prop, cast, and otherwise re-imagine his primary material of wood, taking apart and reassembling its volumes and surfaces so that the resulting works reveal—and revel in—the very activity of their reconfiguration. The self-reflexive nature of Kendrick's creative approach, far from leading to its own limitations, has produced a seemingly endless capacity for variety and richness within the development of his sculpture. Ideas and forms established in earlier works reappear years later, transformed yet recognizable,

to assume their newly defined roles in an expansive, spirited vocabulary of constructing.

Kendrick's career began in New York during the early seventies, at a time when the aesthetics of minimalist and conceptual art dominated the classrooms, studios, and galleries. Looking back, he has called minimalism a "ground zero," wiping clean the slate for sculpture, and all art, to begin anew.¹ Yet from his initial exposure to minimalism's cerebral and formal rigor, Kendrick has retained a concern for systems and logic, an enthusiasm for setting up a visual problem and defining the parameters within which to engage it (though not necessarily to resolve it) that reflects as well the artist's ongoing affinity for geometry and mathematics.² With a measured precision,

but no less importantly with an expectant, energetic sense of discovery and improvisation, Kendrick makes an object.

Kendrick makes sculptures, not sculptural illusions, which extend and restructure the language of sculpture, drawing inspiration in part from the physical immediacy and an emphasis on "truth in materials" in the work of contemporary American artists such as Robert Smithson and Richard Serra.³ The animated angularity and spiraling exuberance of *Black Square*, 1991, for example, exposes Kendrick's working process and unrefined source materials, while subtly alluding to the work of these ground-breaking artists who used reclaimed materials such as molten lead or Cor-ten steel, in Serra's case, or who literally bulldozed earth into sculptural expressions, as in Smithson's infamous *Spiral Jetty*, 1970. Yet, in contrast, Kendrick's art projects a certain accessibility that comes from its objective presence,



1991
poplar, lamp black
44 1/2 x 30 x 22 inches



View of Mel Kendrick's studio,
New York City, Winter 2005
Working models of *Double Core*

spatial configuration, human scale, and insistence on exposing the honesty of his materials by leaving visible the scars of his working process in the finished piece.

Black Square, the earliest work in the present exhibition, relates to a series of sculptures Kendrick produced in the early nineties. Beginning by coating the exterior of a solid, laminated wood block with black oil, he took apart the block with a power saw and recomposed the sections.⁴ The repositioning of blackened and fragmented planes tracks the lingering presence of a surface now dispersed among other wooden segments pulled out from the interior of the original mass. The resulting work is "about" the relationships of parts to the whole, intuitively and imaginatively recombined.

Double Core, 2006, Kendrick's sculpture for the campus of The College of Wooster (see image on page 6), employs some of the key elements and creative strategies used in *Black Square*, in certain respects simplifying and clarifying them. The recent work, again originating from a single block of wood, continues the dialogue between external and internal components, but now with larger forms and broader, gestural cuts comprised of simple angles and sweeping curves that counter the intricate array of zigzags and thrusting diagonals of *Black Square*. The red surface defines the outer dimensions of the cube from which the "cores" of *Double Core* are extracted, recalling the part played by the black oil in the earlier sculpture. But Kendrick also speaks of color as "a kind of skin" in his work, with the capacity to "contradict the type of thought going on in the cutting."⁵ Indeed, that "skin" both emphasizes and veils the grained surface, glue residue, and individual cuts making up the full-scale wooden sculpture from which *Double Core* was cast in bronze. The bronze cast itself replicates but also reinterprets the original wood material as metallic substance, a transformative doubling that adds still another layer to the sculpture's witty self-reference.⁶

In the mid-nineties, Kendrick directly engaged with the effects of twinning in a series of works that pair an original wooden sculpture

with a nearly identical, cast-rubber reproduction of it. *B.D.F.*, 1995, works from the essential premise of that

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prostrate torso, damaged but enduring.⁷ Such corporeal connotations, more intuited than represented, combine with the notational “x” and “y” imagery to underscore the productive interplay between abstraction and allusive physicality that Kendrick’s sculptural language expresses.

The natural materials that Kendrick appropriates and elaborates in works such as *x + y* and *B.D.F.* provide the impetus as well for *Reverse Stump*, 1995, and

absurd spectacle of a solid, paternal presence in close proximity to this similarly styled, spectral, somewhat awkward offspring. Yet here, as elsewhere in his art, the humor Kendrick so often makes palpable results as much from his emphasis on form and process as it does from any possibility of a representational reading.

x + y, 2001, probes the thematics of juxtaposition and anthropomorphic potential still further. Named for the distinct but complementary letter forms it assumes, the sculpture sets the shell of a tree trunk opposite the wooden core extracted from it. Both exterior and interior have been sectioned and their individual pieces refastened with plastic and wire ties. Its horizontal and floor-bound presentation, fractured and repaired substance, and spread, truncated limbs seem to conjure a

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Born in Boston, Massachusetts in 1949, Mel Kendrick received his B.A. in 1971 from Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut, and M.A. in 1973 from Hunter College, New York, New York.

Selected solo exhibitions since 1980 include those at the Nolan Eckman Gallery, New York, New York, 2003; Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire, 2002; Tampa Museum of Art, Tampa, Florida, 1999; Grand Arts, Kansas City, Missouri, 1996; John Weber Gallery, New York, New York, 1995, 1992-93, 1989, 1987, 1985, 1983, 1980; Gerald Peters Gallery, Dallas, Texas, 1994; Margo Leavin Gallery, Los Angeles, California, 1990, 1988, 1985, 1983; Weatherspoon Art Gallery, University of North Carolina, Greensboro North Carolina, 1992; Cleveland Center for Contemporary Art, 1990, 1988; Salama-Caro Gallery, London, England, 1989; St. Louis Art Museum, 1987; and the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 1986. Kendrick's work has been the subject of two traveling exhibitions, and he has participated in over 80 group exhibitions since 1980. The artist has received three National Endowment for the Arts Fellowships and an American Academy of the Arts Award and Purchase Prize.

Kendrick's work is represented in the collections of numerous major museums such as The Art Institute of Chicago; Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York; High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia; Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; St. Louis Art Museum, St. Louis, Missouri; Storm King Art Museum, Storm King, New York; The Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, Ohio; Walker Art Museum, Minneapolis, Minnesota; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, New York.

CHECKLIST OF EXHIBITION

1. **Black Square**, 1991
poplar, lamp black
44 1/2 x 30 x 22 inches
2. **B. D. F.**, 1995
wood, pipe, cast rubber
82 1/2 x 77 x 49 inches
3. **Pipe Hole**, 2000
wood, pipe, rubber, ink
90 x 38 x 39 inches
4. **x + y**, 2001
wood, metal, plastic
12 x 35 x 24 inches
5. **Stack**, 2001
poplar
18 x 5 inches
6. **Three White Blocks**, 2003
wood, gesso
dimensions variable,
approximately 19 inches high each
7. **Double Core**
(working model), 2005
working model
plywood, plaster
52 x 31 x 36 inches
8. **Double Core**
(working models), 2005
mahogany, paint
19 1/4 x 13 x 11 inches (black)
20 x 12 x 13 inches (red)
26 x 15 x 15 inches (blue)

Dimensions h x w x d

All works courtesy of the artist.

MEL KENDRICK

March 28–May 14, 2006

**The
College
of
Wooster
Art
Museum**



A distinction can be made between the terms public art and art in public places. The former usually exists in service to or symbolic of a particular society and takes the form of memorials and monuments, while the latter generally refers to contemporary art practices that move the private museum experience out into the public realm.¹ *Double Core*, 2006, by the New York City-based artist Mel Kendrick falls into the second category; and although it could exist in almost any public setting, the artist's interest in exposing that which lies beneath the surface makes *Double Core* particularly well suited for a liberal arts environment.

In 2004, through a gift from The Howland Memorial Fund, Akron, Ohio, the process of commissioning a piece of public sculpture for The College of Wooster campus mall (south of

and the process of education as activities that, in aggregate, "pull out from within"⁴ the core or innate individual strengths and abilities of students.

These ideas, of course, were not in the artist's mind as he worked through the initial cuts and assembly of the model. However, the committee saw parallels between Kendrick's process of discovery that seeks to expose that which lies within and what happens during the transformative journey students undertake when they enter college. Like *Double Core*, students unfold to new possibilities as they learn, discover, and transform during their college years, unveiling known and unknown facets of their being.

Kitty McManus Zurko
Director/Curator
The College of Wooster
Art Museum