

Art in America

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LEONARDO DREW

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SIKKEMA JENKINS

by *stephen maine*

NEW YORK Spatially aggressive, materially raw and ominous in tone, Leonardo Drew's new work would surely convince anyone who doubts abstraction's potential to tap depths of emotion. The artist's recent solo exhibition was staggering. He has jettisoned the decorousness that has dulled his work in the past, reviving and refining the confrontational tone of his memorable 1992 debut at Thread Waxing Space. The 17 works shown (all 2009) range in size from intimate to enormous but each is heroic in effect.

The 57 1/2-foot-long *Number 135*, made largely of plywood, spanned the main and back galleries. It begins with a bristling protrusion of furring strips, a tangle of old leather straps and rotting fabric, and an encrusted paint bucket. There is a torrent of black at its midpoint; beyond is a prolonged, desolate denouement of sawdust and wood chips. The work's undulating bottom edge suggests creeping slime. If the piece had a soundtrack, there would be distant sirens.

At 15 by 23 feet, *Number 134* develops Drew's familiar barricade format. Stacked against the wall, tightly packed tiers of rough-cut lumber erupt with snaggy roots and plywood scraps. Ad-hoc buttresses shore it up, extending as far as 7 feet into the surrounding space; an unwary viewer might have tripped on one. The work's blackened patina and brooding, geometric shadowland trigger the associations with Louise Nevelson that were once routine in responses to Drew's work.

Two plywood islands, both a bit Manhattan-shaped, bump against each other in *Number 127*. The left and right extremes of this 13-foot-wide work peel off the wall like enormous tongues. One sprouts another bundle of roots; the other, a quiver of sawed-off frame stock, extends perpendicular to the wall. The work's stout, built-out infrastructure heightens the impression of a ruined city seen from above.

An inky, root-and-vine-encrusted totem, *Number 132* hums with the compressed energy of densely packed, disparate materials, as if the Philadelphia Wireman had raided a New Jersey truck garden to produce it. *Number 136* is organized in a grid, its 42 components—roughly framed pictographic shapes suggestive of Arp, but streetwise—nasty and elegant.

Relatively small works on paper, involving graphite, acrylic, thread, wiry vines and wood, underscore the pictorial implications of Drew's method. *Number 128D* embellishes a blackish trapezoidal shape with a stand of splintery shims and a splash of sawdust, a masterful orchestration of design and debris.

Photo: View of Leonardo Drew's Number 135, 2009, wood and mixed mediums, 15 by 57 1/2 by 51 1/2 feet; at Sikkema Jenkins.

