

## Knock on Wood; Most Artists Did in 2010

by Benjamin Sutton



Is wood having a moment? In the last three months, a handful of artists have used wood as both a raw sculptural medium and a support for other materials: [Cordy Ryman](#) continued to explore bas relief, painted assemblages of cut-up two-by-fours at DCKT in early September; days later [Pam Lins](#) showed sliced, painted and varnished rectangular blocks of wood formed into pedestal-like obelisks at Rachel Uffner; and the following week [Matthew Day Jackson](#) unveiled a funeral procession of eight astronauts fashioned out of composite wood board at Peter Blum in Soho. Surely there have been others, and now two more artists exhibiting on the Lower East Side are using wood in very different ways.

[Michael DeLucia](#)'s installation at [Eleven Rivington](#) (through January 8) features about a dozen plywood panels, eight feet tall and four feet wide, each engraved and painted with a geometric pattern in construction-site fencing hues—a grooved cone in royal blue, a rectangular gradient of neon orange, a coil etched into dark black paint. The large minimalist forms and slick shapes play nicely against the roughness of the textures and cheapness of the materials. The Brooklyn-based artist's process extenuates that disparity, with three-dimensional forms designed digitally before being mechanically painted and etched onto inch-thick particleboard, like a no-budget [Donald Judd](#). Two sculptures break with the installation's near-flatness, one of which could be one of the plywood panels folded up into a trapezoid along its grooved lines, as if the surrounding pieces had been delivered flat, Ikea-like, and awaited assembly. Weirdly, though, these seemingly unfinished, raw, slick and monumental plywood boards are the exhibition's most enduring.

The wood in [Jonathan Ehrenberg](#)'s exhibition at [Nicelle Beauchene Gallery](#), *A Shadow As Big As A Hat* (through January 16), is completely precious and treated very carefully, not only by the artist but also by the fictional characters who manipulate it. The native New Yorker's stylized videos are set in a world of monochrome buildings in familiar generic shapes, with actors wearing papier-mâché masks, exchanging surprisingly charged stares and going about quizzical tasks in a tempered, melancholic manner. In "[Seed](#)" (2010, still below), the exhibition's centerpiece, a man with no nose finds one in his food and takes it to a mystic who trades in body parts. In exchange the man receives a twig, which the mystic straps to his face where a nose ought to be; a transformation begins and by video's end the man is an articulated tree with a humanoid head and an owl for a heart. In a much shorter video nearby, the archetypal form of a house unfolds to reveal a scraggly forest inside before pulling back together in an endless loop. Whereas DeLucia turns wood into bizarre and elaborately processed technological objects engraved with digital data, Ehrenberg deploys trees and branches as shorthand for invisible and primordial forces. Both make something new out of wood's material and symbolic flexibility.

*(images courtesy the artists, Eleven Rivington, Nicelle Beauchene Gallery)*