

DAN GUNN

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MONIQUE MELOCHE AND THE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

By Susan Snodgrass



CHICAGO

Dan Gunn's hybrid constructions, whether freestanding or wall-mounted, retain their indebtedness to the history of abstract painting at the same time that they embrace other mediums and disciplines, including sculpture and design. Working across borders and with humble materials (plywood, foil paper, cork, beads), Gunn creates hybrid objects that share affinities with Richard Tuttle's early "Constructed Paintings." However, unlike Tuttle, whose interest lies in the dematerialization of the artwork, Gunn reasserts the primacy of object hood, as was evinced in two compelling, concurrent solo shows.

The 14 works on view at Monique Meloche (all 2011) combine artist-fabricated and found objects put to use as surfaces, supports and frames for traditional modes of painting and mark-making. Gunn's abstract vocabulary and meticulous sense of craft conflate notions of the readymade and the handmade, the intentional and the incidental, changing our perceptions of both painting and the everyday.

Dialog Equipment, for example, is a discarded chalkboard framed with plywood and propped up against the wall on short, turned-wood table legs. The object's previous use as an educational tool plays against the artist's transformations: wooden slats covered with metallic paper create a series of reflective vertical "zips" that divide a ground of calligraphic, Twombly-esque gestures. In several works, Gunn applies acrylic and spray-paint to wood panels to create a stained effect. In one such work, *Terrace*, the artist enhances the wood's natural grain with colored pencil, highlighting each striation in unexpected hues, a process that alludes as much to Pattern and Decoration painting as it does to woodworking.

In the large, three-dimensional *Patchwork Plateau*, created specifically for the Museum of Contemporary Art, the artist constructs a kind of topographical painting, one that, as the title suggests, connects handcraft and landscape. A series of wood panels—some solid, others carved or woven—are pieced together to form an 8-foot-square horizontal assemblage that, elevated on 2-foot-tall legs, evokes a folding screen laid flat. Gunn embellishes the surfaces, all painted in varying shades of green, sometimes adding beads or other decorative elements. Throughout, traces of the artist's hand confront the work's seamless construction, presenting us with a domesticated object whose function is ambiguous, but whose affinity to painting remains satisfyingly clear.

Photo: Dan Gunn: Dialog Equipment, 2011, blackboard, plywood, metallic paper and mixed mediums, 68 by 44 inches; at Monique Meloche.