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Dan Gunn: "Impromptu Airs" at moniquemeloche

by robin dluzen

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Grand Amusement

2014

Dan Gunn

Dye, UV absorbent lacquer on plywood with nylon cord and wire

85" x 60" install

Photo: Courtesy moniquemeloche

In 2011, Chicago artist Dan Gunn was surrounded by a considerable buzz on the occasion of his concurrent solo exhibitions at moniquemeloche and the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago. Three years later, he has more than proven his staying power. Gunn's practice of fusing tactile material with cerebral formalism aligns him with the kind of minimalist, craft-oriented, domestic-leaning MOs established by notable Chicagoans like Michelle Grabner. Gunn's medium is wood, though his works traverse amongst the dialogues of sculpture, painting and textiles. "Impromptu Airs" features a focused series of wall-bound works based on the forms of folding fans and draped curtains. Here, the artist assembles laser-cut slats of wood colored with dye and lacquer into objects that mimic the delicate pleats and creases of his subject matter.

Gunn is remarkably adept at manipulating this otherwise static medium to capture suggestions of pliability and movement. In a series of five "fan" pieces hung in tandem along one wall, red and white stained slats alternate within the "fan" form,

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451 N Paulina Street, Chicago 60622

312 243 2129 moniquemeloche.com

to resemble its folds. At one end, *Ffaannnn No.1* appears opened wide, and each subsequent “fan” is built with narrower strips of wood, with *F No.1* a mere four inches across; one reads the work sequentially, as in a series of animation cels. Implying the potential for motion in a different manner are Gunn’s “drapery” works. *Grand Amusement*, the central and largest piece in the exhibition, is a wooden approximation of folded fabric, and again, Gunn’s illusionistic strategies are at the forefront. Candy-colored slices of wood are cut so as to create the semblance of overlapping fabric, though in actuality, *Grand Amusement* is a single layer of pieces, the appearance of volume implied only through the network of thin lines of gallery wall visible between the slats. However, it’s *Broadway*—the closest of all Gunn’s pieces to a traditional, rectangular painting—that most evidences the artist’s mastery and understanding of his medium. Here, tiny colored circles are situated at the corners where his gridworks of interlocking, monochromatic slats meet. Although they’re stained with the same black dye, the perpendicular pieces alternately appear darker or lighter as the viewer shifts from side to side, the forms glistening as the light upon the wood grain is revealed at different angles.

Gunn has a singular capacity for highlighting certain subtle, aesthetic properties of the wood he employs, proving that the most extraordinary features of his work come not just from what the artist can do with wood, but what he allows the wood to do for his pieces.

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