

DAVID GOODMAN *Apparatus*

by William Corwin

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David Goodman's current exhibition of sculpture and works on paper, entitled *Apparatus*, confronts the viewer with two questions. One is aesthetic: Can two trajectories of visual practice be combined in a harmonious and visually meaningful and satisfying whole? In Goodman's case the answer is yes and works itself out wittily through the small sculptures. The second proposition is both metaphysical and autobiographical: Can an artist reuse, reformat, and to a large extent destroy his own history, and get away unscathed? The response to that, manifested in the works on paper, is less clear. Goodman is a polemicist and is not necessarily looking for an answer—he seems more interested in inspiring discussions. By positioning the historical repurposing question so close to himself, literally plundering his own practice, he doesn't merely ask for the sake of asking but ponders his own place in the context of what an artist's career and life-long production means. At times, the found-object nature of the materials redirects and overwhelms the aesthetic program of the sculptures, while the tactile and geometric issues of the autobiographically revisionist works on paper make us forget that there is any history behind the nature of the medium.

The sculptural works, which Goodman labels *Devices*, inhabit a series of plinths and tables throughout the gallery. They range in scale from small to medium, some approximating the size of mugs and candlesticks where others could compete with desktop printers and stools. Add to that the fact that all of Goodman's pieces are brightly polychromed, and one gets a distinct impression that these pieces are challenging the everyday objects whose size they appropriate. This sets up a series of both scale and historical comparisons. Despite their found-object origins, Goodman's *Devices* are not ready-mades, they dialogue smoothly with Lissitzky and Calder, but in their use of color and



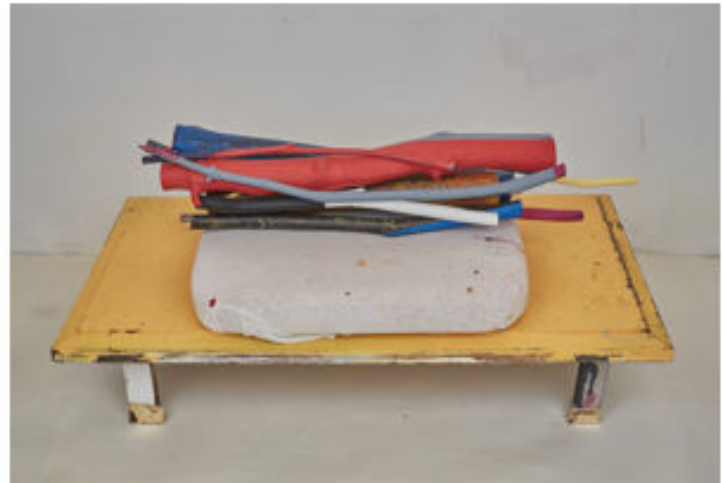
David Goodman, "Departure" (1999-2015). 105 × 68".

pattern also form connections with the traditional religious and spiritual work of the American Indians. Via their household appliance scale, Goodman's pieces are cleverly positioned to ask: What is sculpture? The *Devices* imply the reliability and usefulness of furniture—the devices, such as #2 (2014) and #20 (2015) have legs, balance, and a flat top; #5 and #1 (2014) have a sort of barricade nature. They cannot support anything, but they exert a vector of control. Their construction is an amiable carpentry—intersections are neatly fitted, and while there are numerous sharp angles, they are not threatening. This may be due to their intimate scale—a small, friendly Ron Bladen maquette can grow up to be a very looming and intimidating structure!

The wood is all found, sanded down, and neatly joined, and then painted in bright, crisp geometric forms with jarring combinations of colors: black-and-yellow, red-and-yellow, red-and-gold. These are tried-and-true street sign/heraldic schemes that are meant to demand attention. In "Tuning Stakes Arrival" (2014) Goodman coats found sticks and branches with these patterns and colors and offers a bundle of them on a pillow, itself placed on a little offering table. The divergent geometries

of found-object/ready-made, and precise, almost advertising aesthetic here coincide very comfortably in these vibrant little objects. All the structures are stable, but wedges and shims abound and the unseen hand of the artists indulges in a constant riff on the possibility of physics breaking down. At any moment, all could wobble or even tumble over—another shared concern of architecture, furniture, and sculpture.

The works on paper, called *Departures*, hang along the two non-storefront walls of the gallery and engage in a similar formalistic visual game as the sculptures. While also using found materials, Goodman has made these pieces a referendum on his own history. The artist has shredded and cut up much of his earlier production. The shredded drawings are laminated into a sort of



David Goodman, "TUNINGSTAKES, Arrival (DiaLuna)."
27 1/2 x 15 1/4 x 13".

interwoven mesh. This base looks like the static on an old TV screen—it functions as a solid but flickers as well. In works such as “Departure #6” (1994 – 2015) or “Departure #7 (Skull)” (1994 – 2015) the black, gray, and white shredded bits form a complementary grisaille substrate to the overlaid web of yellowed newsprint strips. These larger strips are merely the shreds enlarged a few orders of magnitude, but we can see the remains of pencil and charcoal sketches—organic patterns and the jaw of a skull. Even the artist’s signature dated “Sept 23, 1994” appears in #6. The larger and more personal bands strive to encompass and hold together the chaos of the throbbing pulp underneath, much as the brightly painted and precise patterns successfully held together the teetering and rickety wood of the sculptures.

The question of whether the history of the artist’s practice is apparent or viable within these shredded skeins is a sticky one, as the fully shredded work has little personality beyond its tactile nature. In “Departure #10” (1999-2015), for example, a consistent layer of gilt has been applied to the paper mesh, as well as a few hairs and bits of dust and fluff. This dissonance of chaos and control, well displayed in the sculptures, seems to be the predominant feature of the works on paper too, despite their implied historical narrative. And then there is the action of shredding

the past as well—it is a destructive and censorious act to desecrate the remnants of the past. It seems even more upsetting to erase one’s own production, or render it into a neutral and voiceless actor in the proceedings.

Again, Goodman does not shy away from the implications of the violence he enacts on his own history. In fact, most artists have at times sought to reinvent and distance themselves from an earlier style or ideology—he has had the courage to make this manifest. But it is primarily in the modest-sized sculptures that all the scintillations of such a varied and fertile field of ideas come across. A piece such as “Device #14” (2014) displays the unexpected form found in random objects subtly manipulated by the artist. It comprises two pieces—an irregular trapezoidal wedge “Mesa,” 5.5 inches tall, and a standing, slender figurative piece “Corn Maiden,” 8.5 inches tall. Both are painted in cerulean and Prussian blues, purples, and whites, with a streak of red on the slender piece—these irregular, rough pieces are united by a careful color scheme that references cubism, constructivism, Bauhaus, and American Indian sensibilities. It conveys the most powerful observation this artist has to contribute through his work: that the deepest metaphysical unity can come through the most abstract gestures. That is the underlying function of *Apparatus*.

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