

ARTFORUM

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Jason Middlebrook

DODGE GALLERY
15 Rivington Street
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Shimmering artifice embraces natural wonder in Jason Middlebrook's new wooden-plank paintings, inscribing nature with the abstract patterns it inspires, in an act of closeness akin to tracing, gilding, gifting. Stele-scale cuts primarily of maple, walnut, redwood, and elm, the fifteen works have long, lean edges that are sometimes smooth, sometimes craggy or crusted with bark. Framed by, and occasionally wrapping, those edges, handsome lines or angular shapes traverse the fissures, streaks, and tawny eddies within the sanded, waxed surfaces. If the results acknowledge Ellsworth Kelly's graceful wood sculptures and Roy Lichtenstein's brushstroke motif—rewilding such visions—they feel no less kindred with Papuan Gulf gope boards.

Acrylic paint here both skids and sculpts. Sinuous inky waves coursing down a wide lane of white hug the scapular curves of *Black and White Number 2* (all works 2011). *Little Black Mamba* transmits the live-wire velocity of freeways long-exposed at night, its single hot-pink line skating in the dark amid bronze currents. Bare material always gets ample air: A rounded leaf of luxuriant myrtle hung at an alary tilt, *All of the Corners* fans to a wide margin beyond the bright, nesting right angles gracing its interior. Faintly iridescent pigments, and occasional mists of spray paint, sensualize hard-edge striping, as in the urban architectural *New New York*.

Other works draw more overtly on wood's time-steeped, time-marking ontology to contemplate, and confound, disparate scales of duration and formation. *Geode Plank*, a rose-spectrum, octagonal starburst around an eroded hole, rhymes arboreal with geologic forms, while massive beech tablet *Once again a version of nature through my eyes*, a geometric tribute to tree rings, exudes atavistic power. As densely lined as fore edges packed aslant, this work nearly quakes in its dizzying concentricity, as if evincing that the book of nature is both fathomless and intensely near.

— Chinnie Ding



Jason Middlebrook, *New New York*, 2011, acrylic on English elm plank, 12' x 3", photo: Farzad Owrang