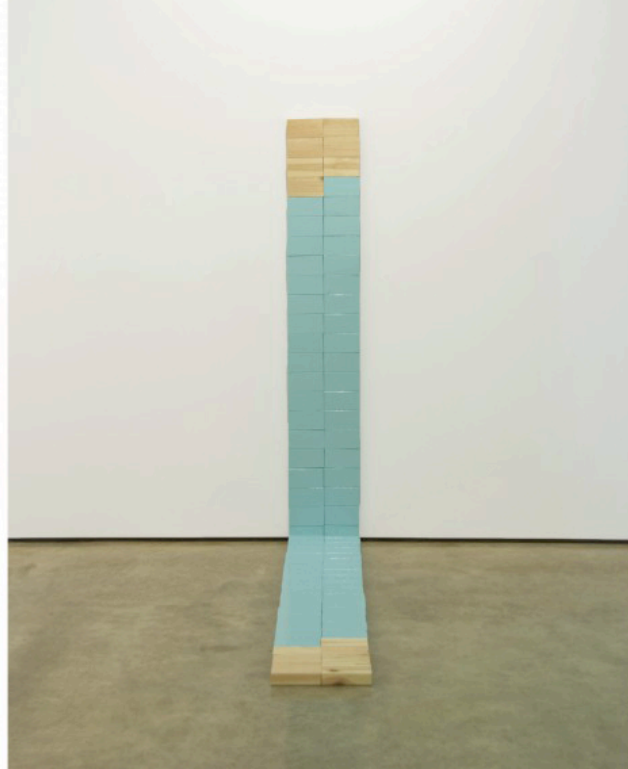


Eric Zimmerman. "Cordy Ryman at Lora Reynolds Gallery". ...might be good. July 30, 2010.



Cordy Ryman, Blue Brick Brace, 2010

Nestled in the ninety-degree space between floor and wall, Cordy Ryman's playful Blue Brick Brace (2010) is a quiet eye grabber. The sculpture's construction foregrounds materiality. Forty-four blocks of wood stretch seven feet up the wall in two parallel rows that total just over twelve inches wide. Seven of the blocks on the top of the column are left raw while the remainder are hastily painted with thick turquoise enamel. Sometimes, the enamel forms hardened drips on edges of the blocks, and often, it subtly masks the seams between parts. At the juncture between floor and wall, a mitered joint transitions the columns into a five-foot stretch onto the floor, the final seven blocks of wood again left raw.

With its L-shaped construction, Blue Brick Brace becomes a tool for seeing and framing the space in which it sits. The vertical section draws our eyes to the height, color and texture of the walls while its horizontal partner towards the sleekness of the concrete floor. The point of connection between the two emphasizes the small gap between the floor and floating gallery wall, the place that, in our homes, is typically occupied by molding. Playing with the architectural space of the gallery through object placement and material manipulation is not a new idea, yet in this instance Ryman does so with a reserved exuberance that is persuasive in its formal beauty and directness.

lora reynolds gallery

Ryman's attention to detail at the transition between wall and floor collides with the slap-dash application of paint and the inconsistency of the overall construction to great effect. Mitered, not simply stacked, this simple joint is a smart tactical move on Ryman's part. Along with the contrast between the smooth horizontal wood grain of the raw blocks and the slick, lumpy plasticity of the painted ones, such details add up to a palpable playfulness that alternates between the serious and the flippant.

The artist's historical lineage is clear-ranging from Constructivism to Judd and capitalizes on the contemporary resurgence of abstraction. Blue Brick Brace conjures Carl Andre with its tile like pattern, and Tuttle with its even-handed embrace of the shoddy, garish and simply elegant. Ryman has learned his historical lessons while fitting perfectly into a contemporary abstraction that is all about play, unabashed visual pleasure and the formal games that can be teased out of materials.

If, like Judd, Ryman's interest lies in having us, through repetition, notice the subtle differences between surfaces, lighting conditions, space and materials, then this particular piece succeeds. It is foremost a beautiful modular object that occupies the specific, albeit generalized, space between wall and floor. Yet Ryman's sculpture raises a critical question about the resurgence of abstraction. Are contemporary abstractions practitioners aiming to merely visually stimulate, or are they attempting to take up some of the perceptual and material questions raised by their forbearers? If abstraction, and Ryman's piece in particular, tells us anything, it's that the starting point lies in specific objects and the results of actively looking at them, noticing their subtleties and listening to what they say.

Eric Zimmerman is an artist and writer who lives and works in New York.