

SHANE CAMPBELL GALLERY

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New York: Jason Meadows: Tanya Bonakdar

Jonathan Goodman

Jason Meadows has been receiving much notice of late. Originally from the Midwest--in 1994 he received his undergraduate degree from the Art Institute of Chicago--he moved to Los Angeles to study sculpture, receiving his MFA from UCLA in 1998. He was quickly noticed in group shows such as "Malibu Sex Party" in Los Angeles and "Brighten the Corners: Five Artists from Los Angeles" in New York. Critics responded to the abstract intelligence of his composite pieces, constructed from mostly industrial materials--steel, wood, and aluminum. Meadows, an artist of unusual invention, appears to casually heap and join disparate objects in a way that reminds one of Jessica Stockholder's random collections of things; at the same time, he has not been afraid to use his usually abstract command of materials in the service of representation.

One has the sense that Meadows turns his audience's attention to the object through the elegant use of repetition in form. He doesn't transform his materials so much as he asks that we view them for what they are, as they are. Steel remains steel; wood remains wood. Often the separate pieces in a sculpture will be joined so that they appear to balance precariously on top of each other, even though whatever connects the parts is clearly visible. The idea of truth to materials--making sure that wood is treated in the composition as wood rather than as a vehicle for an image--has been a truth of Modernism, but in contemporary times, especially since Minimalism, the notion has been looked at askance. Part of Meadows's interest as a sculptor lies in the way he returns to the notion of truth to materials with a new understanding of what can be done. His moderate-size works are full of angles and repetitions in a way that recalls Minimalism and, further back, Constructivism, but they are not meant to overwhelm or threaten. Indeed, he takes too much pleasure in his craft to give himself over to rhetorical power, and it appears that he also wants his audience to enjoy the work as he does.

Calamity (2001) is constructed with wood, laminated pressed board, aluminum, and paint. Three sets of white shelving, connected in the middle by a brown piece of wood, angle perilously, as if Meadows had been able to stop the pieces in the middle of a free-fall. Long, narrow aluminum braces extend from the shelving, linearly extending the reach of the sculpture into the space beyond the shelves. The work is most striking in its use of equilibrium; the structure appears both poised and about to collapse. Recognizing the nuts and bolts that hold the shelves to the wooden panel in the center, we understand that the work will not fall apart, but the rickety, non-aligned placement of its components also asks that we see the work as arrested motion. Calamity is a sharp reading of art as an act of will, not so much against nature as part of it, even as Meadows salvages his forms from the force of gravity.

2021 S WABASH AVE
CHICAGO IL 60616
+1 (312) 226 2223

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In an untitled work from 2001, Meadows has worked out a series of disparate elements that are attached to a central spine of plywood. At the top are branch-like pieces of wood and two expanses of chicken wire, while emanating from the middle, off aluminum struts, are flat planes of a pattern that looks a lot like leopard skin--dark brown splotches against a yellow ground. At the bottom, a piece of wood supports a series of L-shaped aluminum pieces that seem to have an industrial use, but what exactly is hard to say. This sculpture appears to be about forms and patterns and also about appreciating shapes in their own right, rather than as a representational or even abstract composition. In *Web of Spiderman* (2001), Meadows again supports the innate beauty of materials. Three steel basketball hoops, attached to disks, sit on the floor. Blue aluminum poles both back and penetrate these open hoops, creating lines in contrast to the circles. Pieces of black nylon net lie on the floor, suddenly changing from a basketball accouterment to small bits of web.

Meadows's title nods toward popular culture, but one senses that he is more interested in seeing how abstraction and representation influence each other than he is in creating a comic-book icon for a wide audience. Meadows works with his usual materials--wood and aluminum in conjunction with Plexiglas and hardware--in *Live on the Sunset Strip* (2001), but this time the work is representational. One sees the outline of comic Richard Pryor, with a hollow torso, repeated in three planes. Holding a small tube of metal like a microphone, Pryor sits on a stool with the microphone pole close by. Those viewers old enough to remember Pryor's hilarious, intelligent comedy recognize the man by his Afro hairstyle. *Live on the Sunset Strip*, the most recent piece in the exhibition, shows Meadows using his skills in the service of figurative art. It's a daring move, but it works because the viewer can appreciate the artist's abstract abilities even while recognizing the silhouette of an unmistakable human being.

ADDED MATERIAL

Right: Jason Meadows, *Calamity*, 2001. Wood, laminated pressed board, aluminum, and paint, 44" — 48" — 52 in.

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