

January 2008

## Mel Kendrick

David Nolan

With their low center of gravity, rough-hewn chunkiness, and warm red tone, Mel Kendrick's seven "Red Blocks" are endearingly low-tech. These chiseled cubic sculptures resemble three-dimensional jigsaw puzzles or an interpretation of lawn dwarfs in the style of Picasso. Arranged in a near semicircle along the walls of the main gallery, the sculptures had an odd anthropomorphic quality, like a tribe of wooden dolls. (The back room contained a roguish leader of the pack; nearly twice as tall as its rosy brethren and painted Astroturf green, it looks like a deconstructed frog.)

But despite their apparent simplicity, these mahogany building blocks are an elegant exercise in interior/exterior, positive/negative space. Kendrick has essentially recycled each block by using



Mel Kendrick, *Untitled*, 2007,  
wood and Japan color, 31 $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 12 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 12 $\frac{1}{2}$ ".

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everything he carved out of it to embellish its surface. For instance, a cone sitting like a dunce cap on one sculpture has been cut out of the block itself, which retains the cone-shaped hole as part of its structure.

For some time, Kendrick has been employing a variation of this trope—what he has called "dynamic energy generated from within the sculpture." It's an idea he literalizes by leaving traces of his process: pencil lines, chalk marks, and gouges. There is something innately satisfying about the way not a splinter of wood is wasted. It's as if the material has given birth to its own artwork, making one reconsider both the organic nature of the material and the creative process itself. Which is not to say that the work is deadly serious; it retains an air of whimsy. Call it art that is holistic—in the truest sense of the word.

—Phoebe Hoban