

[Close Window](#)[Print](#)

MEL KENDRICK

6/30/11

[DAVID NOLAN AND MARY BOONE](#)by *franklin einspruch*

NEW YORK

Mel Kendrick has native Brancusian sensibilities, but he came into artistic maturity in the 1970s, "when process was everything," as he puts it. Two opposing impulses, one to invent his own geometric forms, another to honor the given geometries of his materials, have been informing his work ever since. Two recent exhibitions—a review of the past 16 years at David Nolan and a display of months-old monumental works at Mary Boone—showed Kendrick's path and its culmination to date.

Black Trunk (1995), at Nolan, pointed the way forward. Kendrick took a 12-foot length of a mighty tree, sectioned and cored it, and put it back together with butterfly joints. After rubbing the surface with ink and making a giant woodblock print from it (*Trunk Drawing*, also 1995), he removed the joints, leaving keyholes through which one can peer into the sculpture's empty, Stygian center.

Intrigued by the cores, he began to remove orderly sections from the insides of gnarled trees. He reassembled the exteriors with wire or zip ties, and put the interior forms back together in the configuration they would have had inside the tree. He then sought ways to relate these external and internal shapes. Kendrick's idea was to make sculptures that used as much of the original material as possible. Here he found a rich angle. The interiors and exteriors, displayed alongside one another, recall the "bursts" of Adolph Gottlieb, which pair a soft oval with a scratchy black blob. The most effective example here was *Plug* (2000), which reconnects the divided parts through a thick umbilical cord, even as they lean away from each other.

For "Blockheads" (2011), Kendrick's most recent series at Nolan, he gave 9-inch blocks of wood a thorough treatment with a hole saw, and stood them upon rearrangements of the extracted cylinders. The resulting homunculi reaffirm the importance of humor to Kendrick's work—the kind of playful attitude that would inspire one to print a tree. Or to make big striped sculptures. For a 2009 installation at Madison Square Park in New York, Kendrick translated the tactility of wood and his methods for working with it into giant blocks of carvable polystyrene. He then cast them in alternating layers of dark gray and white "cast" in concrete. The sculptures stood out against the greenery like zebras.

A continuation of this series, four 16,000-pound concrete pieces from this year, all titled "Jack," appeared at Mary Boone. They share a motif of three intersecting cylindrical cuts, reincorporated as in "Blockheads," but with the extractions placed above instead of below. The white layers dissolved when viewed against the gallery walls, while the dark ones, a handsome slate hue, reasserted the objects' presence. Cubic bases with dramatic tunnels cut through them evoke architecture: chapels dedicated to an ideal usage of components, made attractive to the touch, and topped with 4-ton forms as delightful as simple toys.

[View of Mel Kendrick's exhibition at Mary Boone.](#)

find this article online: <http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/reviews/mel-kendrick/>

[Print](#)