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# Mel Kendrick: *Tilt*

By [Alfred Mac Adam](#)



Mel Kendrick, *Gemstone*, 2026. Mahogany, 42 × 37 × 20 inches. Courtesy the artist and David Nolan Gallery.

*Tilt*

David Nolan Gallery

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A walk through Mel Kendrick’s show, *Tilt*, is like a visit to the Sacro Bosco: a landscape filled with fanciful monstrosities. You have no idea why anyone would construct such a place, your curiosity is enthralled, and you stroll around in wonder. Kendrick’s transformation of the gallery into a garden of wonders catches us off guard. We just don’t know what to think until we stop, stare, and begin to suspect that there may be a method to Kendrick’s madness, that he has created a mini universe, “A mighty maze! but not without a plan,” as Alexander Pope rationalizes the perplexity of the universe we inhabit but did not create.

Kendrick works in wood—walnut and mahogany—and he uses a saw to carve, hollow out, and fit together his floor and wall pieces. The saw is Kendrick’s brush; the execution is a direct translation of a plan formulated in his mind that takes concrete shape before his eyes. He can change his mind, make mistakes, correct them, allow chance to do its work, and thus transform blocks of wood into complex architectonic structures.

Two pieces constitute an introduction to Kendrick’s eccentric aesthetic. *Gemstone* (2026) is meant to be seen in the round—therefore occupying more space than its modest size would seem to require. The piece projects an aura of power while simultaneously recalling Goethe’s 1777 *Stone of Good Luck*, that strange sphere mounted on a cube. Unlike Goethe’s monument, Kendrick’s work is pierced, open, as if to invite the viewer to make some kind of spiritual investment. Wherever we look on this remarkable piece we find triangular shapes, traditional symbols of fire and ascension.



Mel Kendrick, *Red, Yellow, Blue*, 2026. Mahogany and Japan color, 100  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 76  $\frac{1}{4}$  inches. Courtesy the artist and David Nolan Gallery.

On the viewing room's east wall hangs *Red, Yellow, Blue* (2026), a mighty maze indeed, that constitutes a map of Kendrick's mental planning. Here color is paramount, and Kendrick's choice of red, yellow, and blue may well be an echo of the spiritual element present in *Gemstone*, since red insinuates passion, yellow illumination, and blue reverence. Kendrick may not have had specific values in mind for these colors, but their juxtaposition suggests that this puzzle-like piece is a

species of mandala, a chart helping the viewer to achieve insight. The various components Kendrick uses to construct the piece are themselves dotted with circular holes, rectangles, and triangles, an esoteric code only intelligible to Kendrick himself, the internal communication between his mind and his saw.

In the corridor connecting the north and south viewing rooms are three examples of Kendrick's graphic work, prints he makes by pressing a mold onto cast paper and pigment. Mounted on stretched canvas, these graphic pieces combine drawing, printing, and sculpting, and their irregular surfaces remind us of the malleable material of which they are made. The transition from wood to cast paper is smooth because the patterns created in the pressing process echo the patterns in the wall sculptures.



Installation view: *Mel Kendrick: Tilt*, David Nolan Gallery, New York, 2026. Courtesy David Nolan Gallery.

The sculpture in a niche in the corridor along with the pieces in the south viewing room show Kendrick in full. In *Double Core* (2006), we see the possible presence of Constantin Brâncuși: this sculpture alludes to his infinite column, which Kendrick transforms into a ziggurat, capped by a rough rectangle with a half-moon cut out of it, an observation platform. The larger scale standing works in the south room, *L* (2025), *Billy* (2025), and *Withstand* (2026) introduce whimsy and humor, almost in the mode of Jean Dubuffet, but without the French artist's anthropomorphism.

But the piece de resistance is tucked away in the northwest corner of the southern room. *Walnut Shelf* (2026) is a slab of wood with four small sculptures arranged on it, like a shrine for private devotion. The individual pieces can be moved around, so each new arrangement would reflect the viewer's taste, while at the same time we understand that this small work is a compendium of Kendrick's sculptural motifs, the architecturally constructed objects that flow from his mind to the wood. *Tilt*—the title comes from a 1928 photograph hanging in Kendrick's studio of a Maine house blown off its foundation and tilted over—is a dazzling maze of the mind.

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