

# rachel uffner

# ARTFORUM

**Pam Lins: Ten in One Gallery - New York - exhibition of plywood sculptures**  
**ArtForum**, Oct, 2003 by Nell McClisten

At first glance, Pam Lins's plywood sculptures look like exercises in medium-scale art-school carpentry, but soon they click into familiarity, like fragments of a recurring dream, then slowly relax into intriguing, elusive, odd yet plain forms that appear simultaneously fragmented and perfectly self-contained. The main space of the artist's recent show contained five wall-mounted works (all 2003), each comprising curved, boxy constructions, irregular flat shapes, and a representational element, in most cases a small painting on a scrap of paper or canvas. *Worn Down Grass*, a long, low console like an unfinished Judd or Morris, curves up at one end to support a large plywood disk, while a section of the opposite corner has been removed to reveal a painting of a sunny landscape featuring an orange Igloo cooler.

Lins has been working with air vents, air ducts, and puffy-cloud imagery for several years; here she has loosened and complicated her usual strict forms and endowed each work with an elaborate dreamlike narrative. In particular, the works containing vents now hint at a world beyond the baseboard, at a quasi-domestic contemporary unconscious. Peering into *Vented Rug*, one imagines one's miniaturized self slipping through the slits cut in cardboard, shooting through the quick corrugated curve past an abbreviated skyscape, and skidding to a stop on the Oriental rug beyond, perhaps in the quiet living room of a bookish Narnian scientist. The more surrealist sequence of *The Coast* leads through a small (real) metal vent past a roiling fictional planet and into a painted bonfire via a doll-size diving board.

The historical precedent for Lins's work is perhaps what Lucy Lippard termed "eccentric abstraction" in an essay for a show she organized in 1966: in brief, the fusion of surrealism and primary-structure Minimalism into a self-sufficient whole that would irreverently obliterate a host of dichotomies--form/content, flat/deep, negative/positive, even painting/ sculpture. (Objects as varied as Don Potts's bulging floor sculptures, Eva Hesse's thread-on-panel works, and Bruce Nauman's delicate latex wall pieces were included in Lippard's exhibition.) In "eccentric abstraction," the so-called death premise of Minimalism is tempered with vivacity and humor, while the primary structure's formal rigor grounds any hint of the narrative or fantastic. Lins herself partially dismantles the Minimalist box to reveal slices of the everyday world and adds details that facilitate a reading of the object not only as, say, an air duct but also as furniture or a horizon line. Here, flatness and space, abstraction and representation, figure and ground are fluently knit together.

In an essay from 1967, Lippard remarks that, "despite its detachment," the primary structure's "aggressive vacuity can establish a tremendous intimacy with the patient viewer." But rather than a grand eroticism as weighty as the "death premise," Lins's idiosyncratic work uncovers a sensuality, a whimsical surrealism that facilitates a synthesis of form and content while preserving the terms of Minimalism's material confrontation with the viewer.

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