

rachel uffner

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Rachel Uffner Gallery

By Brian Boucher

New York Before visiting Cooper Union professor Pam Lins's latest show, "Problem Picture Sources New Sculptures" (all works 2010), one would have done well to think first about Ad Reinhardt's quip: "Sculpture is something you bump into when you back up to look at a painting." One might have then paged through the catalogue for MoMA's exhibition "The Original Copy," which deals with the relationships between photography and sculpture. And if one had started at the back of Uffner's gallery, one would have found a painting on the wall that mimics a canvas used by Brancusi as a dramatic backdrop when photographing his sculptures. All this would have nicely set the stage for Lins's funny and fearfully brainy show of sculptures that spell out her preoccupations vis-à-vis her medium.

Six sculptures, generously human-size at around 6 feet high and 2 feet square, crowded into the small gallery, forcing visitors to thread their way among them and to consider point of view, as each sculpture at times blocked the view of the others (words like "obstruction" and "delay" figure into their titles). Each consists of a plywood box, some faces left raw, some painted with acrylic or reflective auto-body paint in monochrome or in abstract designs; this varying treatment highlights, even exaggerates, the necessity to perambulate freestanding sculpture. The works are supported by subtly varied pedestals and reveals, like illustrations in an artist's manual of the options for sculptural presentation. Each piece also includes an empty niche, implausibly set into a corner of the plywood box—as if some smaller sculpture that normally resided there had flown the coop. The angular shapes of some of the niches echo Brancusi's *Endless Column*.

Atop each plywood box stands a small canvas by Lins, so that the sculptures become (in a twist that recalls Rachel Harrison) display furniture. Encouraging the viewer to make figural associations, two of the paintings depict the iconic heads, copied from famous sculptures, of Medusa and Abraham Lincoln. To make things even more complicated, one sculpture is topped not by a painting but by a sculptural cast of a painting, recalling Johns's "do something else to it" maxim (make a painting; make it part of a sculpture; make it a sculpture). The paintings of sculptures, moreover, have their sources in photographs found in books or online, reminding us that any consideration of the vantages from which we view sculpture must account for the perspective embedded in the 2-D source.

Two inkjet prints on the wall introduced a fictitious book, *The Fifth Leg: A Psychological History of Sculpture*; they show the volume's cover and table of contents. The title refers to Assyrian relief sculptures of human-headed winged lions that graced the corners of palace doorways and that, when seen from a particular angle, appear to have five legs. They serve Lins as an emblem for the ever-shifting point of view. One line in the faux table of contents expands on this idea as it also alludes to Reinhardt: "Walking around a sculpture and running into a photo." It's stimulating fun to watch Lins further extend sculpture's "expanded field."

Photo: Pam Lins: Lincoln bookend obstruction, 2010, acrylic on panel, plaster and plywood, approx. 60 by 23½ by 23½ inches; at Rachel Uffner.



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