

DODGE gallery

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Natural Order of Things
Ellen Harvey and Jason Middlebrook
curated by William Stover

November 13 – December 23, 2010

Ellen Harvey and Jason Middlebrook question and explore the relationship between our everyday lives and the place and meaning of art in the contemporary world. With a keen awareness of their roles as artists, each approaches the subject of where art lives and how it functions. In works central to the exhibition, both Harvey and Middlebrook intervene on found or borrowed surfaces, inserting their own mark-making while working with the contrasting history of the material or environment that is being appropriated. They are interested in provoking challenge, interrupting the natural order of things, imprinting their art onto the world, while inviting meaning in the very contrast between their mark-making and where it lives.



Included will be Harvey's *New York Beautification Project* (1999-2001), a "guerrilla" intervention into public spaces throughout New York City. In response to Mayor Rudy Giuliani's crackdown on graffiti, Harvey began to think "about how disorderly sites in the city are really some of the only places available for non-professional artists to express themselves in public. I was curious to see what would happen if you changed the aesthetic of graffiti by painting small idyllic landscapes in oil and also the demographic of the artist." For two years, she painstakingly executed forty highly-detailed landscape paintings onto stairwells, lampposts, garbage dumpsters and other spaces already covered with graffiti. Exploring such notions as who is allowed to make art in our society and what constitutes acceptable artistic interventions in public spaces, Harvey's interactions, and in some cases altercations, with the individuals she met on the streets of New York while making her graffiti is as equally as important to the project as the finished paintings.

Jason Middlebrook works with a variety of materials that include the recycling and transformation of discarded materials into installations, objects and functional furniture. His *Plank* series of sculptures (included in this exhibition) continues the artists' longstanding practice of using "materials that have a history and that still have a future." In this body of work, found wooden planks are recycled by the artist into objects imbued with a new sense of meaning and intention. Letting the wood's grain determine the direction of his markings, or allowing the grain to show through overlain geometric imagery, the planks both refer to the natural environment of the wood's origin while being overtaken by surface covering, or "graffiti". Lined up and leaning against the wall, the planks are between the height of a tree and the human figure. Investigating the complex relationships between nature and culture, order and chaos, and decay and regeneration, Middlebrook turns his attention to the often tense relationship between man and nature. "I was raised in a mountain community in Northern California and went to the University of California at Santa Cruz. Nothing could be more beautiful than these environments; however, the city has its beauty as well. New York City inspired me and continues to do so because nature is always pressing, always growing up through the cracks."

