

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**A BREAK FROM CONTENT: JASON MIDDLEBROOK**  
**November 19 – December 23, 2011**  
**Reception: Saturday, November 19, 6-8pm**



DODGEgallery is pleased to present *A Break from Content*: Jason Middlebrook, the artist's first solo exhibition with the gallery.

Middlebrook's long-standing interest in abstraction, intersecting disciplines and nature are the cross-currents of his most recent exhibition. For the first time, Middlebrook is presenting an in-depth investigation of a singular body of work: his *planks*. The exhibition also marks the artist's most abstract body of work to date.

Hand-selecting internal cuts of Cury Maple, Redwood, English Elm, and Cairo Walnut tree trunks, Middlebrook laboriously covers the planed façades with repeating geometry in highly saturated pigment. His line-dominant compositions imply infinite extension beyond the bounds of the plank form, confronting and expanding the viewer's sense of space. Middlebrook's unprecedented absence of representational imagery heightens the figurative nature of the planks themselves, while allowing for landscape references to dominate the exhibition. Whether colorful or monochromatic, the paintings fluctuate between being harmonious and incongruous with the natural shape, tone and grain of wood. Middlebrook's planks are a meditation on the complex relationship between humankind and nature, a long-term topic of investigation for the artist.

For Middlebrook, the planks are both objects and surfaces, sculptures and paintings. Whether standing, leaning, or wall hung, the planks engage their surrounding context, connecting the space between the pictorial plane and physical dimension. The series recalls the works of John McCracken, though here the planks contain the memory of time and are painted with highly individualized surfaces. Another influence is Sol LeWitt in his commitment to obsessive line-making on existing surfaces and interest in scale, though Middlebrook is more intuitive than rule based. In certain works, the sensation of movement through color and pattern recalls Bridget Riley, refusing a primary focal point and creating an overall optical impression. At times, scale overwhelms, however the most awe-inspiring moments are ones when the laboriousness and remarkable beauty of Middlebrook's painting embodies the sense of time and magnificence instilled within the trees themselves.

A substantial piece in the show, *Finding Square*, is made from several planks that were planed from the same tree. Middlebrook cut and mitered four corners to create a wall-hung "frame" which becomes the painting itself, leaving a central cavity that implies the absence of painting. Pushing Frank Stella's notion of "picture as object," Middlebrook is literally making his paintings on objects. However in this case, the objects house their own rich history and irregularity. One of the most daunting works in the show, *Vertical Landscape Painting*, is a 13 foot high plank that towers far above one's head and is swathed in subtle gradations of green and blue that vibrate between countless stripes and undulate above the tonal shifts of wood. Another piece, *Once again a version of nature though my eyes*, resembles a wide topographical map with rings of black lines building out from the core of the tree. In this piece, as in many works in the exhibition, Middlebrook uses the natural wood as a distinctive color in his palette. The overall impression of the exhibition is a body of work that strikes an unfettered balance between content and aesthetic, formalism and unapologetic beauty.

Image: Jason Middlebrook, *Once again a version of nature through my eyes*, 2011, acrylic on beech wood, 78 x 60 x 3.5 inches, photo: Karen Pearson