

# HYPERALLERGIC

Sensitive to Art & its Discontents

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## Space, Play, Form and Distortion

By Don Elder

Walking through the Lower East Side this morning, I couldn't help but revisit a lingering thought I have had about the reemergence of a loose trend in today's young contemporary art: formalism. They say that history repeats itself, and if you were to look at the aesthetic decisions of many of today's strongest emerging artists, I would argue that their work shares certain formal and conceptual characteristics that we should all remember from Modern Art 101. The work I am referring generally shares a specific emphasis on minimal form, color, line, texture and objecthood. An excellent example of this type of new formalism can be seen in the work of Michael Zelehoski's solo show *Secondary Structures* at Dodge Gallery.



Michael Zelehoski, "Suspension boards" (2011) (all photos by the author)

A highlight of the show, "Suspension Boards" (2011), shows the true strengths of Zelehoski's innovative construction technique by creating a dynamic, dimensional composition. The individual elements appear to shift, twist and rotate perspective independently of one another while existing on the same plane.

From a normal viewing distance this work appears to have an eerie dimensionality and realism, but when viewed up-close one can really appreciate the manipulation of perspective and materials in the work. Looking at this work at a close proximity reveals the exhaustive process and attention to detail that went into making these works. Each individual part has been rendered in thin slices of lumber that create a rich, textured hyper-realistic image that really makes it difficult to discern the flat from the three-dimensional. Adding to the delicate lamination of wood, Zelehoski scored lines into the support that extend from the edges of the objects to the edges of the frame. These lines are a considered gesture that first stress the warped perspective of the objects while also filling out the composition of the frame and saving the objects from a potentially boring existence floating in the middle of an empty space.

I opened this review by noting the relationships this work has to an emerging stylistic trend in the art world but I would like to close by drawing a comparison with contemporary culture and media. Zelehoski has made conceptually and materialistically complex art objects that encourage dialogue on the blurred border between two and three-dimensions. This may be an old topic in art history, but in contemporary media it's all the buzz.



An installation view of Michael Zelehoski

With the rise of 3D cinema and 3D TV there has been a strong push in popular culture for a certain level of realism in our media — this desire for realness doesn't feel much different from the early Modernist ideals of purity in painting and sculpture.

**CORRECTION:** The author made a mistake in the original publication of this review. The author originally indicated that the pieces in this show are laminated when in fact the works are actual three dimensional constructions that are inlaid piece by piece. Additionally, the lines seen on the surface are not scored lines, but evidence of the piece by piece construction used to make each work. The author would like to apologize for this mistake.