

Leonardo Drew at Pearl Lam Galleries, Hong Kong

Leonardo Drew, Solo Exhibition, 13 Nov - 31 Dec, 2015



Leonardo Drew in his Brooklyn studio.

In 1988, Leonardo Drew arguably found his artistic voice with his seminal work *Number 8*. Using rope, animal hide, raccoon skull and a dead bird, *Number 8* is a black mass of detritus, which hangs from the wall like a curtain of darkness. With this work in mind, and the thoughts of destruction and decay it engenders, I approached Drew's recent exhibition at Pearl Lam Galleries, Hong Kong with a sense of foreboding. What I discovered at the gallery however proved surprisingly different.

Included in the show are thirteen new sculptures: ten made from his staple material of wood, and three on paper. To produce his works Drew uses a very physical process, working up to twenty hours a day; sawing, burning, and nailing parts together to construct his large wooden forms, or delicately weaving cotton and paper together. Drew refuses to define the end result; for him the works come from his internal spirit, something he just has to 'get out.' There is no conceptual drive to his creative process, simply emotion and energy.

Perhaps the most prominent work, *Number 9C*, is a vast wooden sculpture that hangs from the wall. The work is the product of 'artistic cannibalism,' whereby Drew has taken elements of old works and combined them, giving the piece what Drew feels is a 'bigger history.' This alternative approach aligns his practice with regeneration and the cyclical nature of things. The vast wall work, *Number 21C*, exemplifies this, appearing to grow out of the white space, encroaching on all corners of the gallery. In a passing comment, Drew mentioned that if he had his way he would take *Number 21C* back to the studio and develop it further, adding three-dimensional elements and expanding the explosive pattern.



Image: Leonardo Drew, *Number 9C*, 2015. Wood and paint, 244 x 244 x 66 cm. Image courtesy of Pearl Lam Galleries

Although Drew started out as a painter in the 1970s, he altered his practice and decided to take away the 'crutch' of painting in an effort to go beyond the norm. However, for his Pearl Lam show, Drew has reintroduced colour and paint, returning to the past to challenge himself. The daubs of colour across such works as *Number 14C* are erratic and unrefined. Drew applies them once the wooden form is complete, seeing this element as separate to the work's initial construction. By reintroducing paint in his practice, Drew appears to have found a way to reinforce his bodily effort; each patch of colour references his artistic touch.



Image: Leonardo Drew, *Number 14C*, 2015. Wood, paint and screws. 89 x 64 x 21 cm. Image courtesy of Pearl Lam Galleries

Despite their organic aesthetic, Drew's works seem at home in Hong Kong: a cityscape framed by cranes and scaffolding, as one building is taken down and another is put up. From his very physical process, to his cannibalistic tendencies, Drew's practice produces unstable multifaceted assemblages, which are far from the destructive aesthetic I had anticipated. Rather, the works are imbued with an infinite sense of action and growth; they are overflowing with a latent potential for regeneration.—[O]

Leonardo Drew's exhibition is on show at Pearl Lam Galleries, Pedder Building, Hong Kong until 31st December 2015.