

MEL KENDRICK



RE: ASSEMBLE

Mel Kendrick makes art that explores the act of making and remaking, and the ideas that evolve in this simple yet sophisticated pursuit. For over thirty years, a continuing commitment to investigating process has motivated him to cut, saw, drill, mark, color, fasten, stack, prop, cast, and otherwise re-imagine his primary material of wood, taking apart and reassembling its volumes and surfaces so that the resulting works reveal—and revel in—the very activity of their reconfiguration. The self-reflexive nature of Kendrick's creative approach, far from leading to its own limitations, has produced a seemingly endless capacity for variety and richness within the development of his sculpture. Ideas and forms established in earlier works reappear years later, transformed yet recognizable,

to assume their newly defined roles in an expansive, spirited vocabulary of constructing.

Kendrick's career began in New York during the early seventies, at a time when the aesthetics of minimalist and conceptual art dominated the classrooms, studios, and galleries. Looking back, he has called minimalism a "ground zero," wiping clean the slate for sculpture, and all art, to begin anew.¹ Yet from his initial exposure to minimalism's cerebral and formal rigor, Kendrick has retained a concern for systems and logic, an enthusiasm for setting up a visual problem and defining the parameters within which to engage it (though not necessarily to resolve it) that reflects as well the artist's ongoing affinity for geometry and mathematics.² With a measured precision,



Black Square, 1991
poplar, lamp black
44 1/2 x 30 x 22 inches

but no less importantly with an expectant, energetic sense of discovery and improvisation, Kendrick makes an object.

Kendrick makes sculptures, not sculptural illusions, which extend and restructure the language of sculpture, drawing inspiration in part from the physical immediacy and an emphasis on "truth in materials" in the work of contemporary American artists such as Robert Smithson and Richard Serra.³ The animated angularity and spiraling exuberance of *Black Square*, 1991, for example, exposes Kendrick's working process and unrefined source materials, while subtly alluding to the work of these ground-breaking artists who used reclaimed materials such as molten lead or Cor-ten steel, in Serra's case, or who literally bulldozed earth into sculptural expressions, as in Smithson's infamous *Spiral Jetty*, 1970. Yet, in contrast, Kendrick's art projects a certain accessibility that comes from its objective presence,

COVER

View of Mel Kendrick's studio,
New York City, Winter 2005
Working models of *Double Core*
in foreground and to the right



B.D.F., 1995
wood, pipe, cast rubber
82 1/2 x 77 x 49 inches

spatial configuration, human scale, and insistence on exposing the honesty of his materials by leaving visible the scars of his working process in the finished piece.

Black Square, the earliest work in the present exhibition, relates to a series of sculptures Kendrick produced in the early nineties. Beginning by coating the exterior of a solid, laminated wood block with black oil, he took apart the block with a power saw and recomposed the sections.⁴ The repositioning of blackened and fragmented planes tracks the lingering presence of a surface now dispersed among other wooden segments pulled out from the interior of the original mass. The resulting work is “about” the relationships of parts to the whole, intuitively and imaginatively recombined.

Double Core, 2006, Kendrick’s sculpture for the campus of The College of Wooster (see image on page 6), employs some of the key elements and creative strategies used in *Black Square*, in certain respects simplifying and clarifying them. The recent work, again originating from a single block of wood, continues the dialogue between external and internal components, but now with larger forms and broader, gestural cuts comprised of simple angles and sweeping curves that counter the intricate array of zigzags and thrusting diagonals of *Black Square*. The red surface defines the outer dimensions of the cube from which the “cores” of *Double Core* are extracted, recalling the part played by the black oil in the earlier sculpture. But Kendrick also speaks of color as “a kind of skin” in his work, with the capacity to “contradict the type of thought going on in the cutting.”⁵ Indeed, that “skin” both emphasizes and veils the grained surface, glue residue, and individual cuts making up the full-scale wooden sculpture from which *Double Core* was cast in bronze. The bronze cast itself replicates but also reinterprets the original wood material as metallic substance, a transformative doubling that adds still another layer to the sculpture’s witty self-reference.⁶

In the mid-nineties, Kendrick directly engaged with the effects of twinning in a series of works that pair an original wooden sculpture

with a nearly identical, cast-rubber reproduction of it. *B.D.F.*, 1995, works from the essential premise of that series. A section of a large log, notched in several places and propped up on end by an assortment of natural and fabricated wood legs, stands next to a splayed open rubber version cast in sequences that produced a faceted interior visible through the translucent material. The facets, resulting from the pooling of liquid rubber in the mold, create an inner geometry caused by the constant repositioning of the mold and the effect of gravity on the process. The doubled forms and juxtaposed materials of *B.D.F.* promote additional consideration of binary terms: organic and synthetic, closed and open, permanence and vulnerability. Its title refers to Kendrick’s earlier designation of the piece as *Big Daddy Fun*, which might also invite us to enjoy the slightly

Reverse Stump, 1995

wood, pipe, mending plates, threaded rod
92 1/2 x 67 x 65 inches





Pipe Hole, 2000

wood, pipe, rubber, ink
90 x 38 x 39 inches

absurd spectacle of a solid, paternal presence in close proximity to this similarly styled, spectral, somewhat awkward offspring. Yet here, as elsewhere in his art, the humor Kendrick so often makes palpable results as much from his emphasis on form and process as it does from any possibility of a representational reading.

x + y, 2001, probes the thematics of juxtaposition and anthropomorphic potential still further. Named for the distinct but complementary letter forms it assumes, the sculpture sets the shell of a tree trunk opposite the wooden core extracted from it. Both exterior and interior have been sectioned and their individual pieces refastened with plastic and wire ties. Its horizontal and floor-bound presentation, fractured and repaired substance, and spread, truncated limbs seem to conjure a

prostrate torso, damaged but enduring.⁷ Such corporeal connotations, more intuited than represented, combine with the notational “x” and “y” imagery to underscore the productive interplay between abstraction and allusive physicality that Kendrick’s sculptural language expresses.

The natural materials that Kendrick appropriates and elaborates in works such as *x + y* and *B.D.F.* provide the impetus as well for *Reverse Stump*, 1995, and *Pipe Hole*, 2000. Made from tree fragments that largely preserve the integrity of the original wood form, both sculptures also expose the interior workings of the tree through selective cutting and hollowing that transform the wood’s mass and volume. In *Reverse Stump*, for example, Kendrick cores a ponderous chunk of gnarled tree stump, inverting it and holding it off the floor on steel pipe and composite wood legs, maintaining its thick and corrugated bark that may be scrutinized both from the outside and the inside. The surface of *Pipe Hole* is similarly perforated, now with crisply drilled holes whose geometric precision counters the irregular, natural aperture at the base of the trunk. The machined openings impart an incongruous delicacy to the split trunk, lightening a density that is itself amplified by the ink with which Kendrick has stained the wood.⁸ The given properties of the tree sections join with the artist’s judicious intervention to create two distinct sculptural experiences: hulking and substantial in *Reverse Stump*, comparatively buoyant in *Pipe Hole*.⁹

Kendrick props both *Reverse Stump* and *Pipe Hole* with metal plates and rods, recalling to a certain extent the presentation of *B.D.F.* on welded metal stands. These armatures are extrinsic to the natural properties of the wood yet integral to the works’ overall expression. The base or pedestal is rarely incidental in a

Three White Blocks, 2003

wood, gesso
dimensions variable,
approximately 19 inches high each



Kendrick sculpture, functioning as much more than a mere supplement. Such is the case in Wooster's *Double Core*, but that work creates a pedestal out of its own rearranged volumes—a foundation formed from an exploration of the block in which all pieces must be used. This return to an investigation of the painted, geometric mass that began in earlier sculptures, such as *Black Square*, is signaled elsewhere in the objects Kendrick has been making more recently. In *3 White Blocks*, 2003, he once again asserts a cubic vocabulary of both interior space and surface plane, with an economical visual authority and vitality that belie the modest height of each construction. Kendrick compares the exploratory nature of his sculpture to *drawing*, an observation that might be gauged most clearly in such small works, seen in ensemble, and in the several maquettes, or working models, of

Double Core in the exhibition. The marks he makes are cuts, not lines on a surface, but they register with a physical immediacy and a wealth of visual information about the creative process often associated with drawing of a more conventional nature.¹⁰ These three-dimensional “sketches” possess a spontaneous yet considered record of the artist's direct thought and the activity of making—interrelated revelations which Kendrick endeavors to preserve when working on a larger scale, as evidenced in *Double Core* itself. As this most recent work attests, he continues to follow a singular path of inquiry, making sculpture with an absorbing and lively intelligence.

John Siewert
Assistant Professor
of Art History
The College of Wooster



Notes

- 1 Elyse Goldberg, “Interview with Mel Kendrick, February 2001,” in *Mel Kendrick: Core Samples* (Hanover, NH: Hood Museum of Art, 2002), 31.
- 2 Kendrick considered a math major in college before shifting his focus to film, photography, and other art classes. See Michael Boodro, “Mel Kendrick's Calculated Risks,” *ARTnews* 90 (May 1991): 107.
- 3 While distinct in style, the site-specific earthworks of Smithson (1938–73) and the process-driven sculpture of Serra (b. 1939) both may be seen, like Kendrick's own art, as responses to minimalism.
- 4 See Trevor Richardson, *Mel Kendrick: Black-Oil Sculpture & Drawings, 1991–92* (Greensboro, NC: The Weatherspoon Art Gallery, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 1992).
- 5 Boodro, 104.
- 6 “Part of making bronze works,” Kendrick notes, “is a denial of wood, even if cast metal can accentuate some of the effects of wood. Wood presents a limited vocabulary, and the best way to change a work is by changing its most basic premise—that is, by shifting materials.” See Bruce W. Ferguson, “Mel Kendrick and the Well-Adjusted Object,” *Art in America* 78 (February 1990): 154.
- 7 Although he resists overt representation, Kendrick acknowledges that viewers may respond to a figural dimension in his sculpture: “I realize that in any object the body or the absence of the body is profound—it is there, it is a part of the work. In a sense, if you look at an empty room, even that is about the body.” See Goldberg, 42.
- 8 Since 1995, Kendrick has used the surfaces of such freshly inked sculptures as three-dimensional woodblocks to make a series of prints on paper.
- 9 The rubber straps in *Pipe Hole* might be read both as counteracting and participating in this permeable character, anchoring the weight of the tree's bark to itself. Kendrick refers to the value of embracing imperfections and highlighting them through “repair” as essential contributions to the history of the sculpture's creation. See Goldberg, 37.
- 10 Jonathan Goodman, “Mel Kendrick: Nolan/Eckman,” *Sculpture* 22 (December 2003): 73.

x + y, 2001

wood, metal, plastic
12 x 35 x 24 inches

An essay about the sculpture *Double Core* can be found on the interior fold of this brochure (page 6).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are indebted to Mel Kendrick for his insight and artistic vision that resulted in *Double Core*. The artist's energy throughout the project was contagious, and his high standards and professionalism resulted in a work of public art that The College of Wooster can be proud of both now and into the future.

We thank The Howland Memorial Fund, Akron, Ohio, for their generous gift that made *Double Core* possible, and the Fund's Trustees, The Akron Community Foundation, and John Frank, whose enthusiasm for this project enriched and enlivened the process.

My heartfelt gratitude goes to those on the committee who oversaw the commissioning process. Committee members included John Siewert, Assistant Professor of Art History; David Gedalecia, Professor of History; Sara Patton, Vice President of Development; and R. Stanton Hales, President. To Walter Zurko, Professor of Art, a personal and professional thank you for his generous support and feedback. I am also most appreciative of John Siewert's illuminating essay on Mel Kendrick's art in this brochure.

Our gratitude goes to Beau Mastrine, Director, Campus Grounds, and Peter Schantz, Director, Physical Plant, who handled the many site details for the installation of *Double Core*.

And this exhibition could not have taken place without the indispensable efforts of Doug McGlumphy, Museum Preparator, and Joyce Fuell, Administrative Coordinator. Thank you for your dedication to this project and the exhibition.

Kitty McManus Zurko
Director/Curator
The College of Wooster
Art Museum

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Born in Boston, Massachusetts in 1949, Mel Kendrick received his B.A. in 1971 from Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut, and M.A. in 1973 from Hunter College, New York, New York.

Selected solo exhibitions since 1980 include those at the Nolan Eckman Gallery, New York, New York, 2003; Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire, 2002; Tampa Museum of Art, Tampa, Florida, 1999; Grand Arts, Kansas City, Missouri, 1996; John Weber Gallery, New York, New York, 1995, 1992-93, 1989, 1987, 1985, 1983, 1980; Gerald Peters Gallery, Dallas, Texas, 1994; Margo Leavin Gallery, Los Angeles, California, 1990, 1988, 1985, 1983; Weatherspoon Art Gallery, University of North Carolina, Greensboro North Carolina, 1992; Cleveland Center for Contemporary Art, 1990, 1988; Salama-Caro Gallery, London, England, 1989; St. Louis Art Museum, 1987; and the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 1986. Kendrick's work has been the subject of two traveling exhibitions, and he has participated in over 80 group exhibitions since 1980. The artist has received three National Endowment for the Arts Fellowships and an American Academy of the Arts Award and Purchase Prize.

Kendrick's work is represented in the collections of numerous major museums such as The Art Institute of Chicago; Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York; High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia; Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; St. Louis Art Museum, St. Louis, Missouri; Storm King Art Museum, Storm King, New York; The Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, Ohio; Walker Art Museum, Minneapolis, Minnesota; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, New York.

CHECKLIST OF EXHIBITION

- 1. Black Square**, 1991
poplar, lamp black
44 1/2 x 30 x 22 inches
- 2. B. D. F.**, 1995
wood, pipe, cast rubber
82 1/2 x 77 x 49 inches
- 3. Pipe Hole**, 2000
wood, pipe, rubber, ink
90 x 38 x 39 inches
- 4. x + y**, 2001
wood, metal, plastic
12 x 35 x 24 inches
- 5. Stack**, 2001
poplar
18 x 5 inches
- 6. Three White Blocks**, 2003
wood, gesso
dimensions variable,
approximately 19 inches high each
- 7. Double Core**
(working model), 2005
working model
plywood, plaster
52 x 31 x 36 inches
- 8. Double Core**
(working models), 2005
mahogany, paint
19 1/4 x 13 x 11 inches (black)
20 x 12 x 13 inches (red)
26 x 15 x 15 inches (blue)

Dimensions h x w x d

All works courtesy of the artist.

MEL KENDRICK

March 28–May 14, 2006

The College of Wooster Art Museum

Ebert Art Center
Sussel Gallery

© 2006 The College of Wooster Art Museum
1220 Beall Avenue, Wooster, Ohio 44691
330-263-2495 • www.artmuseum.wooster.edu
All works © Mel Kendrick

All Rights Reserved. No portion of this brochure may be reproduced without the written permission of The College of Wooster Art Museum.



Double Core, 2006

bronze, pigment

107 x 65 x 78 inches

The College of Wooster Art Museum 2006.1

Gift of The Howland Memorial Fund, Akron, Ohio

(Photograph taken at Polich Art Works,

Rock Tavern, New York)

DOUBLE CORE: A HISTORY OF ITS OWN MAKING

A distinction can be made between the terms public art and art in public places. The former usually exists in service to or symbolic of a particular society and takes the form of memorials and monuments, while the latter generally refers to contemporary art practices that move the private museum experience out into the public realm.¹ *Double Core*, 2006, by the New York City-based artist Mel Kendrick falls into the second category; and although it could exist in almost any public setting, the artist's interest in exposing that which lies beneath the surface makes *Double Core* particularly well suited for a liberal arts environment.

In 2004, through a gift from The Howland Memorial Fund, Akron, Ohio, the process of commissioning a piece of public sculpture for The College of Wooster campus mall (south of Kauke Hall) began. Following a similar format that resulted in another commissioned public sculpture on campus—Michelle Stuart's *Four Seasons*, 1987²—a committee was formed to oversee the mall commission comprised of several College faculty, museum staff, and administrators. From an initial review of thirteen artists, three were asked to produce a sculpture proposal for Wooster. Of the three, Mel Kendrick's then unnamed wood maquette was selected by the committee to be cast in bronze.

The artist worked for over a year translating and rearticulating the six-inch high model into a full-size wood sculpture over nine feet tall that served as the pattern for the casting process. During this period of exploration, Kendrick made adjustments to the surface quality of the sculpture through a series of enlargements (see brochure cover), while carefully retaining the proportions of the initial model, Kendrick decided to use

rough-cut, stacked, bolted and pegged lumber to build an actual sculpture so that the reality of its making would translate directly into the finished bronze surface and retain the markings of its construction. Making a full-size sculpture was far more labor intensive for the artist, but Kendrick felt that simply enlarging the model from the original wouldn't provide the same visceral sense of an actual built object. Cast and patinated at Polich Art Works in Rock Tavern, New York, the completed *Double Core* is abstract yet animated, and reveals its narrative through surface details, color, overall form, and the artist's sure command of his visual vocabulary and intent.

The model for *Double Core* came from one of Kendrick's ongoing studio practices of creating sculptural sketches cut from painted blocks of wood that are then reassembled, revealing the unpainted interior. These sketches are intentionally made on a small scale to facilitate a spontaneous, playful, and gestural feeling that would not be possible on a larger scale.

There is a certain humor located in the discovery of how *Double Core* once fit together, its tumbling quality, and the seemingly rough construction translated into the traditional medium of bronze. The negative space of the curved hollow in the open top suggests the positive of the curved cone extracted from the interior of the block of wood, with the red surfaces referencing the exterior of the original cube. On another level, *Double Core* also speaks to an unmediated process of direct creative thought through the cast evidence of cuts, gaps, glue drips, and rough wood, revealing what Kendrick calls a "history of its own making."³

Rife with associations, although certainly not literal in any sense, the model of *Double Core* was selected by the sculpture committee for many reasons, not the least of which are its associations with the education process. One can imagine both the facture of *Double Core*

and the process of education as activities that, in aggregate, "pull out from within"⁴ the core or innate individual strengths and abilities of students.

These ideas, of course, were not in the artist's mind as he worked through the initial cuts and assembly of the model. However, the committee saw parallels between Kendrick's process of discovery that seeks to expose that which lies within and what happens during the transformative journey students undertake when they enter college. Like *Double Core*, students unfold to new possibilities as they learn, discover, and transform during their college years, unveiling known and unknown facets of their being.

Kitty McManus Zurko
Director/Curator
The College of Wooster
Art Museum

Notes

- ¹ Suzanne Lacy, *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* (Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 1995), 22. In 1967, the federally funded Art in Public Places Program was established, and a percent for art program begun by cities and states. This program mandated that all federally funded new construction reserve one percent of the building's project cost be directed toward public art.
- ² Michelle Stuart's *Four Seasons*, 1987, is located in the courtyard of the Scheide Music Center on The College of Wooster campus. The four-panel bronze sculpture was a gift from the The Howland Memorial Fund, Akron, Ohio.
- ³ Bruce W. Ferguson, "Mel Kendrick and The Well-Adjusted Object," *Art in America* 78 (February 1990): 150. Kendrick also mentioned this concept during an interview with the author at Polich Art Works on January 9, 2006.
- ⁴ Jonathan Goodman, "Mel Kendrick/Nolan Eckman," *Sculpture* 22 (December 2003): 73.