



"Broken Lines Series 2" is a 2010 wax, resin and pigment on board by Phil Binaco.

SLOWBUILD

Artists in LAUNCHPROJECTS exhibit preoccupied with material, surface

LAUNCHPROJECTS is located in the historic Francisca Hinojos House on East Palace Avenue, but the small gallery inside is thoroughly contemporary and favors a minimal aesthetic. Exhibitions are carefully considered, concisely curated and smartly installed — allowing space for conversation between artworks. Exhibitions at LAUNCHPROJECTS are never over-hung.

Cyndi Conn, co-founder and director of LAUNCHPROJECTS, takes pleasure in mixing it up and presenting work by locally, nationally and internationally known artists. The current exhibit of painting, sculpture and drawing by Phil Binaco, Munson Hunt and Richard Serra is a good example. Hunt has exhibited extensively in the Southwest, Binaco has a national profile, and Serra is considered by many to be one of the most significant sculptors of our time. (New York's Museum of Modern Art mounted a 40-year retrospective of his work in 2007.) It's a good combo of artists — all three privilege minimal forms and limited color, focusing attention on material and surface.

Serra is also known for his powerful works on paper: paint stick drawings and editioned prints like those in the exhibition. There's a sense of materiality that directly relates to his sculptural practice. In "5," from 1998, a heavily textured black ovoid form built up out of layers of

paint stick fills the space, pushing out toward the confining sides of the slightly convex handmade paper — smudges function as an indexical record of making. The irregular edges and surface of the crater-like form are repeated by the paper's deckle edge. Once goopy, the dried paint stick, much thicker in some places than others, has retained textured impressions and shoeprints in the surface, conveying a full-body performative aspect of "making" similar to Serra's famous 1968 site-specific lead "splashing" in "Nine at Leo Castelli," a show installed at the dealer's warehouse on West 108th Street.

In some ways, Phil Binaco's refined pigmented wax and resin paintings on wood panels are the opposite of Serra; however, they, too, focus on building a surface out of a material-based process. The exhibit includes one small signature translucent white piece and two larger dark gray-black paintings from 2010 that both engage with and depart from the history of monochrome. Most monochrome painting is abstract, with the same thickness or thinness of paint across a continuous



Munson Hunt's untitled sculptures (wedges) are abstract monolithic forms of pine, clay and paint.

field of one color — the focus therefore being on surface and materiality.

From a distance, Binaco's paintings appear to be just that: fields of light or dark. Upon close inspection, however, we see that the painting's surface was created by slowly layering translucent and opaque blues, grays and blacks. It's not the stereotypical encaustic painting look but rather a smooth, soft surface built up over time.

Additionally, delicate vertical lines have been incised into the various layers, creating a pictorial composition not typically found in monochrome — a kind of drawing in the paint.

Occasionally there's a pause or space where the line stops and restarts. "In Broken Line Series 2," the incised lines create an all-over pattern of rectangles that in turn function as broken lines, but in "Broken Line Series 1," the space is divided into two unequal parts that are treated differently, thereby engaging the spatial tensions of the modernist painting field. The left hand with its lines incised from top to bottom contrasts with a dense modulated surface unmarked by inci-

sions on the right. One wants to read the two areas relationally, but they insist on occupying the same flat pictorial space.

Munson Hunt is primarily known for her large carved wood sculptures — abstract monolithic forms with rounded edges. In this exhibition she is represented by "Untitled," a grouping of three free-standing, taller than life-size pine wedges that sit directly on the floor.

Ranging in height from 65-75 inches, and measuring 12-14 inches wide at their base, each planed wedge tapers to an irregular thin and toothy top. They are primarily two-sided, suggesting bodies. Like Serra and Binaco, Hunt honors her materials and chooses her surface carefully. The pine forms are stained black, then painted with a clay-based paint that dries gray, emphasizing the sharp corners, the wood's grain and cracks, and Hunt's tool tracks.

The piece, completed in 2010, actually comprises four elongated wedge forms that can be installed in various configurations in relation to a specific site. Here at LAUNCHPROJECTS, space considerations dictated the arrangement of three with the fourth wedge standing alone in a second gallery. I find the forms far more engaging as a group than individually. Hanging out together, like three sisters, the variations in size, contour and surface are activated. Belying the scale and weight of the wood, the wedges appear light and graceful. There is a kind of elegant simplicity, even vulnerability, to this new work.

Do try to see this exhibition. LAUNCHPROJECTS is open by appointment, but don't feel funny about calling — you don't have to be a potential buyer. They are happy to open the gallery for anyone interested in serious looking (on-site parking makes it easy).

Art Matters



HARMONY HAMMOND
For the Journal

If you go

WHAT: Phil Binaco, Munson Hunt, Richard Serra

WHERE: LAUNCHPROJECTS, 355 E. Palace Ave.

WHEN: Through June 8

CONTACT: 670-9857 or www.launchprojects.com



COURTESY LAUNCHPROJECTS
"5" is a 1996 paint stick on paper by Richard Serra.