

**WEBEXCLUSIVE**

ARTSCEEN

**Structured Simplicity**

by Benjamin Tripp

Structured Simplicity  
Dumbo Arts Center  
June 20 – August 9, 2009

This colorful show of new sculpture, video, and installation sets out to explore the rudimentary nature of form, material and utility in art making. The artists in the exhibition share an interest in what unadorned materials communicate alone. Newspaper, cardboard boxes, a rug and several other household items become sculpture that is more plastic and/or alien than anything a viewer might recognize as familiar. These artists seek simplicity by way of a minimum (or at least subtle) manipulation of what's at-hand.

The exhibition's title is vague and misleading. It seems to imply that most structure betrays the simplicity of its materials, as if to claim that this group of artists' unique accomplishment reveals how simplicity can be sustained throughout their process. Some of the artworks accomplish that, but those that do are the least structured ones.



In Amy Yoes's video "Modification and Collapse," small geometric forms move towards and around each other jerkily as if attracted by magnetic push-and-pull. A soundtrack of odd clicks and whirrs accompanies the image, evoking the placid, synthetic streamlined atmospheres of the supermarket check-out-line.

The animation is choppy like stop-motion. Chains of multi-colored dots traverse the picture plain. Semi-translucent glass planes converge. The way it's animated makes it seem amateurish in the best way: it's playful despite the complexity of the abstraction at work: an evocative landscape of pyramids, triangles, dots and lines that continually deconstructs itself. It almost has a homemade quality. And the alternating colors (uniform silver & dark-blue & white to pink & and yellow) lighten up the show.

The materials used in the installations range from newspaper to an odd quartz-like rock called 'zeolite' which seems as though it must have originated in outer space. This variety testifies to a sense of adventure in working with whatever's available in as many ways as possible, and seeing every process through to the end to discover what results. Hilary Harnischfeger makes a hardness and piled-up quality almost palpable in her blue painting with protruding sea-foam green-and-white stripped bits that resemble ribbon candy. Elana Herzog's enigmatic strips of tapestry present a terrific complication of the space, depth and texture on the gallery wall. Their staples pressed into the wall give them an immediacy and toughness while also shining like fragmented silver weave. The tapestry seems to be surfacing from inside the white wall. It's called 'chain-link' and there's an interesting material paradox in how the soft, corded fabric on it is in the pattern of chain-link fencing.

Fabienne Lasserre's hanging pieces of wool and ceramic rings appear almost camouflaged and are difficult to notice in the heavily timbered gritty old barn-like industrial gallery space, and might benefit from a more traditional situation against a white gallery wall. His long worm-husk tubes resemble cartilage or bone; there is something almost prehistoric about them. In one the husk tube bit is a handle attached to a waxy stripped canvas titled "Without being abrupt", which is a start to saying "I don't mean to be abrupt, but I would like you to walk up to this and grip it by the handle and wrench it off the wall yourself."

In his book of lectures *Six Memos for the New Millennium*, Italo Calvino identifies two elemental examples of structure that art may seek to embody from nature: the flame, which is dynamic on the outside and static on the inside; and the diamond, which is static on the outside and dynamic on the inside. The most successful work from *Structured Simplicity* boldly communicates its material presence to the viewer from the diamond end of things: an unchanging exterior juxtaposed with an endless abstract interiority that is, in a manner of speaking, simply complex.