



GALLERIES



Derek Flack

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Slices of life Dennis Lin exposes the layers in n° 1-60

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BY DAVID BALZER February 19, 2010 13:02

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“Here I was born, and there I died”: Kim Novak’s famous words from *Vertigo* could be the subtitle of n° 1-60, Dennis Lin’s great new sculptural installation at 47, a gallery he also co-owns. Lin has imported a large maple tree from British Columbia – perhaps destined for the mill, and also bearing distinct signs of termite infestation – sliced it into 60 numbered sections, each three inches wide, and hung it horizontally across the diagonal of the spare, large space. Like Novak’s Madeleine in front of a cross-sectioned California redwood, one traces the lifespan of the tree through the richness of its growth markings – simple inscriptions of time indicating both the resilience and brevity of life.

Lin’s arrangement is key, with unmistakable geological and paleontological overtones. It’s a conceptualist standard – the object giving way to metaphor and narrative precisely because it is presented with such brutal objectivity – but it works. Inevitable guessing games ensue. Does the slabbed-up tree look like a dinosaur skeleton? A gigantic spine? Is it, in its felled, chopped state, a phallic symbol gone awry? Do the large steel hooks from which the slabs dangle suggest a slaughterhouse and, if so, act as a comment on deforestation? The game is fun because such questions seem so easy, so overly ponderous. Actually, it’s quite possible that Lin meant for his grand gesture – which is in the macho, *Richard Serra* tradition of sculpture (just imagine Lin taking a buzz saw to the thing) – to be, in part, funny.

The marks of the termites provide a final gloss, on top of the oil and wax that Lin himself has applied. More than the rings of the trunk, even, which are, for the most part, obscured in his arrangement of the slabs, the termites’ work sounds the note of doom, drawing attention to the role devouring life has played in the tree’s death. Gaze into the hole the creatures have made in the tree’s core, essentially erasing the record of its birth, and see one hell of a memento mori. Unsubtle? Of course – but that’s nature for you.

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