

BARBARA COOPER

Barbara Cooper's latest exhibition at Gerald Peters Gallery presents complex sculptural vasculatures recomposed from hefty volumes of scrap veneer discarded by the furniture industry. These elaborate creations are Cooper's way of giving a second or third incarnation to the material. Like geological strata, or the fantastic Gordian tangles assumed by unattended electrical cords, her works offer the unmistakable indications of an intensive process without disclosing any real clues about its development.

Works like *Occulus* and *Surge* are elegant and self-enclosed. In *Occulus*, wooden bands wind around the implied perpendicular axes, carrying energy toward the poles. This gives the shell a constricting quality, which scoops toward the center, converting into a centrifugal blossom. *Surge* vaults itself as a fibrous convex bridge, harnessed by a ribbed concave central support. Both of these generalized topographies fold into nexus spaces of continuous curvature, like the theorized saddle shape of the expanding universe.

The hanging piece *Fall* has a flowing quality unique in the collection. Cooper says fluid dynamics was her primary inspiration for this piece. There is an interesting contradiction between the weight and appreciable tension in the bowed materials, and the supple freeform undulations assumed by the piece. The languorous turns of its vertical section resist interpretation as a cascade, complicating the orientation of the piece in relation to gravity, and suggesting a phase shift from water to vapor.

Folia is the most overtly representational piece in the show, evoking a tree stump with a three-quarter twist, yet it speaks volumes on Cooper's treatise on natural history. One of the central considerations of her work is how organic forms inherit a unique structural memory from an adaptive response to environmental contingencies. An organism's growth is a historical record of the contest between the resilience of its life force and the unique environmental impingements it faces. *Folia* vividly postures a complex personal history.

Thrust is constructed with a subtle yet boggling intricacy. Roughly suggesting a bouquet of coral made of flaky filo, this piece has a gentle asymmetry that tilts its graceful dualities slightly off kilter. This sculpture presents the most straightforward development among the pieces, with an open-ended but arrested stage of unfolding. As usual, there are rich binary oppositions in *Thrust*, in this case presenting multiple epicenters of radial growth.

Cooper has evolved an entire architectural vocabulary of interacting and vying elements. Ramifications, stratification, involution, cauterization and inflexion begin to approximate what Cooper is tangibly discovering through the competition of materials for space.

GERALD PETERS GALLERY
1011 PASEO DE PERALTA, SANTA FE



Barbara Cooper, *Fall*, wood and glue, floor section: 74" x 30" x 13", wall section: 85" x 30" x 18", 2004