



Art

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MODERN BROOKLYN

A formalist occasion at DUMBO's Smack Mellon
by Sarah Schmerler

Two solo shows are currently on tap in Smack Mellon's trendily raw DUMBO space: one, by sculptor and Hunter/SVA instructor Peter Dudek; the other by sculptor-cum-installation artist Elana Herzog. The pairing's good. Both are formalists at heart and at much the same place in their careers. But the subtle, yet powerful ways in which their works differ give the show its frisson.

Although Dudek gets the lion's share of the gallery's space, it's Herzog, in the smaller back room, who ends up having the last word. Her work doesn't fill the space so much as define it by clinging to its edges. That's typical of her process, in which she affixes a particular fabric (in this case, plaid wool—hence the show's title, "Plaid") to sheetrock with industrial staples. She then systematically rips the fabric away, sometimes leaving bits of fluff, sometimes long tendrils, still gripping the wall. For my money, the more minimal, the better, and here the resulting patterns are so spartan and strangely placed (high up one column, down low by the floor) that at a distance you might mistake them for stains. Ultimately, however, a cooler impression sets in; what we've got here is a roomful of little Modernist drawings—which Herzog went to a lot of trouble to create.

Dudek, on the other hand, is a noodling rearranger of objects and shapes. He riffs on high Modernist architecture and design tropes (think Le Corbusier, the Eameses) with lowbrow materials like plywood, cardboard, industrial office furniture, and felt. And he loves shifts of scale. A lilliputian kid's chair hides under a desk; above it, an abstract wire sculpture balances at the very top of a pile of furniture. In a modest space, such arrangements might come off as feats of formalistic skill. But alas, in Smack Mellon's cavernous room they're less *mise-en-scène* than sideshow. Dudek's playful show title—"New Monuments to My Love Life"—unintentionally adds a little clash-of-the-sexes tension to the proceedings. Here's a guy who begins with Modernism, and ultimately loses our interest; Herzog's a woman who, after a battle with domestic fabrics, arrives at Modernism, triumphant. Now, which is the greater love?