

Michelle Lopez

SIMON PRESTON GALLERY

Turning Minimalist form against itself is hardly a new idea—one might even consider, it a genre unto itself—but it still offers room for maneuver. In "Vertical Neck," her second solo exhibition at Simon Preston, Brooklyn-based artist Michelle Lopez presented a strong, clean suite of five new sculptures that capitalize on the movement's enduring legacy but sidestep parody and polemic to arrive at a more subtly allusive language. Lopez isn't afraid of explicit critical reference—in 2009's *Portrait of Artist as Special Mission Project/Akira Revisited*, for example, she went after Takashi Murakami's objectification of Asian women—but here that impulse was reined in, and the results are the more satisfying for it. In its seeming restraint, the show exuded a bolstered confidence.

Blue Angels and *Blue Angel* (all, works 2011) contain the show's most immediately identifiable art-historical references, playing on the high shine of Californian *Finish Fetish* sculpture and the tangled metal forms of John Chamberlain. Three roughly folded and heavily crumpled sheets of aluminum lean against the wall and tower above head height, their interiors painted blue or black, their exteriors white or colorlessly reflective. The suggestion that attempts at formal perfection are necessarily doomed to failure is clear, but in their fun-house-mirror distortions, these works direct that argument at not only artistic folly but also the viewer's own vanities and imperfections. Still, the news isn't all bad; there's an insinuation in the aluminum's shiny, paper-like surfaces of gift wrap, a hint of celebration and renewal.

In two sculptures titled *Your Board*, Lopez employs the seven-ply-maple-and-granular-grip-tape makeup of a standard skateboard, but replaces the familiar lozenge shape with a square-ended strip that droops from the wall and trails onto the floor like a length of paper. The top section of each of these (one work features a single example, the other a pair) folds over onto itself to expose a pale verso, and the dark sparkle of the grip tape that covers their outward-facing surfaces makes for a satisfying chromatic and textural contrast with the bare wood. Broad ripples running through these forms add to the illusion of their flexibility as does the way in which their corners curl up slightly where they meet the floor.



Michelle Lopez
Your Board, 2011
maple plywood, grip
tape, 60 x 16 x 4"

There's an entertaining shock of misrecognition to Lopez's repurposing of such a specific and functional pairing of materials, but Your Board offers more than just a skatepark take on Surrealist transformation' The objects' apparent shift from rigid to flaccid, partially manufactured to fully organic, aligns the substances from which they are made more closely with living, breathing bodies. Hanging there as if set out to dry' they even have something of the look of animal pelts (harking back, perhaps, to the artist's extensive use of leather in previous works). And they offer, as do the other works here, a critique of Minimalism's macho streak, deflating its showboating "extreme" pose as trenchantly as Lynda Benglis and Eva Hesse once did.

Finally Flare alludes to a characteristically precise sculpture of the same name by John McCracken-but in place of the five ultrasleek resin-fiberglass-and-plywood bars that make up the 2008 original, Lopez's 2011 incarnation gives us eight dangling strands of hand- molded resin clay And where Flare the first luxuriates in coats of flawless primary and secondary color, Flare the second squirms under the queasy sheen of pearlescent metallic car paint. As always, there is a hint of nose-thumbing at the consistent anality of the Guys, but Lopez's remake is more understated, more extensive, more radical-and a lot more appealing-than that might imply.

-Michael Wilson