

## [Christian Maychack @ Gregory Lind](#)

Posted on 29 May 2011



"Interleaf (CF #11)", 2011, Magic Sculpt, pigment, chair caning and wood, 20 x 28.5 x 4.5 inches

In contrast to his earlier and often more playful sculptures and installations, Christian Maychack, in his latest exhibit, *Uncertain Spaces*, reveals himself to be an ever-restless artist, willing to open new terrains in his investigations into everyday materials and forms. Using found chair caning and wicker baskets as supports, he creates a series of sculptures that appear ancient and new, brittle and concrete, smooth and ragged. This balance between opposite sensations demonstrates attentive craftsmanship and a deep engagement with his materials.

Each piece in this exhibit is constructed with pigmented epoxy resin, which is molded into and around the caning and basketry. The forms are then carved and sanded to reveal as much as construct the resulting sculptures. The materials combine to create fascinating patterns; though carefully molded by hand, they appear to seep into the grids of the chair caning, without ever overwhelming the original supports. On several pieces, like the wonderful *Compound Flat #8* and the stacked chair-backs of *Interposition*, additional layers are created with inlaid pigment and scraping, resulting in forms that suggest abstract hieroglyphs as much as modernist grids.

The use of caning provides patterning within each sculpture without ever over-determining their design or composition. While the wicker forms function as the base relief for the epoxy and subsequent manipulations, the works never appear to be strictly concerned with either the material as found sculpture or with foregrounding its specificity in terms of design or shape. While lending the sculptures a sense of ornate cross-hatching, the caning also melds into the epoxy at times, like a fibrous rebar skeleton. Often

the sculptures seem to exceed their supports, as if they are but fragments from some greater structure, giant buildings made of concrete and wicker.

*Traverse Red (CF #7)*, for instance, uses layering and color to subtly give the sculpture a sense of age, like an ancient artifact or section of parchment, replete with some long-ago Arabesque detailing. Indeed, several of the works in the exhibit seem to belong to an imaginary age whose history had been preserved in crumbling concrete or buildings made from thick paper and layers of fabric. *Interleaf (CF #11)* similarly carries a sense of another epoch, as if a book had been fused by time and seismic pressure into the fragmented rock-like base. In these and other pieces, the chair caning seems woven into the sculpture, as if pressed between the paint and sculptural materials. The effect is of something buried inside the works, not something that is central to their construction.

While from a distance the surfaces seem rough, the evidence of scraping, sanding and polishing betray an extremely worked surface that, rather than flattening the layers of pigment and epoxy, seem instead to bring out a rich grain and textural quality to the wash of colors and materials. The swirls of pigment show an attention to color and design without denying contingency and improvisation; indeed, even though Maychack colors the epoxy from within, the pigment appears to be the result of Pollock-like pouring and splashing, such that the caning appears to distribute it within the matrices of its grid and weave. The result is a balance between pattern and randomness, order and entropy. By using the woven caning and wicker as framework for pictorial space, Maychack is able to play with color and texture as if on a porous canvas, further erasing the distinction between painting and sculpture.



"Habitant", 2011, Magic Sculpt, pigment, found basket and wood, 15 x 10.5 x 3 inches



"Surface Exchange", 2011, Magic Sculpt, pigment and found baskets, 15 x 47 x 38 inches

A couple of pieces use found wicker baskets, including the largest work in the exhibit, *Surface Exchange*. Baskets, of course, function as containers (as chairs function as supports), and in these pieces we see how Maychack explores the functional capabilities of each, using the found baskets as both containers for poured materials and as sculptural molds. Here, the baskets are upturned; their handles are used to prop them up: their molds are empty; the pigmented resin seeps through the bottoms of the baskets, fusing them together.

In a similar fashion, *Habitant*, a smaller wall piece, uses a found basket, though here it seems scrunched against the wall, as if overtaken by Maychack's added materials. Unlike the large floor piece, *Habitant* succeeds in using its materials without making them about the basket. At the same time, the more obvious attention to the found object in *Surface Exchange* helps draw attention back to the other more subtle pieces in the show, bringing them into a larger conversation about the role of the found object, be it as source material or sculpture in its own right.

Gertrude Stein used to call a certain kind of thinking "basketing." It was a reference to her dog Basket and to how her interactions with the animal required her

to think differently. Christian Maychack's basket-and wicker-based sculptures do something similar. By dissolving and recombining notions of how certain objects and substances are supposed to interact, Maychack effectively alters our perception. As his works prove fertile for new encounters with the visual and tactile, the new and the seemingly ancient, they transform modes of looking and sensing – something that only the best art produces in viewers.

–DAVID BUUCK

*Christian Maychack: "Uncertain Spaces" @ [Gregory Lind](#), through June 18, 2011*

Cover: (Detail) *Surface Exchange*

About the Author

[David Buuck](#) is a writer who lives in Oakland, CA. He is the founder of BARGE, the Bay Area Research Group in Enviro-aesthetics, and co-founder and editor of Tripwire, a journal of poetics.



"Transverse Red (CF #7)", 2011, Magic Sculpt, pigment, chair caning and wood, 16.5 x 16 x 2 inches