

Sunday, February 4th, 2018

Biting a Thumb at Monochrome: Jim Lee at Nicelle Beauchene

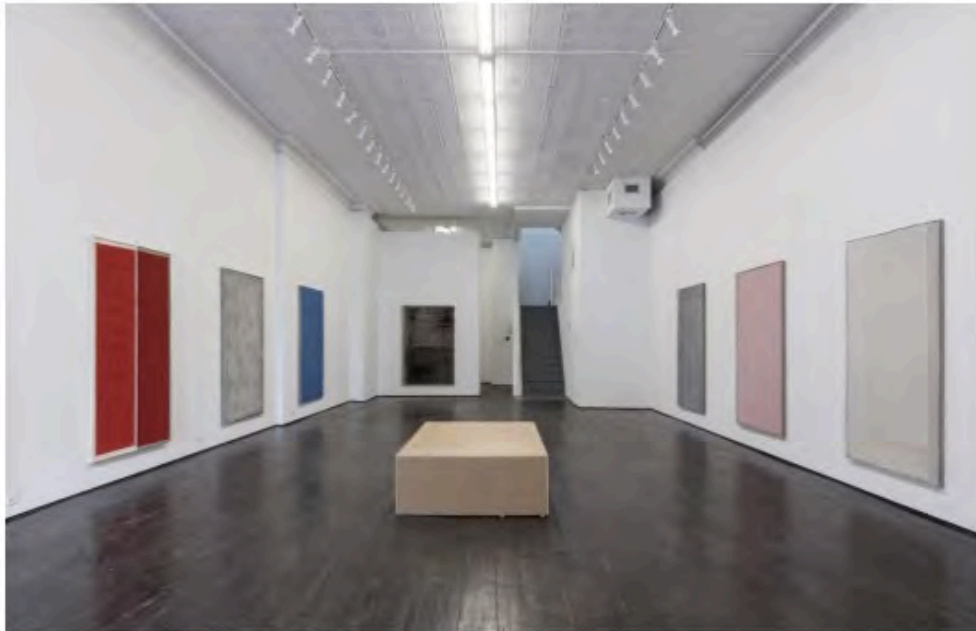
by Kara Cox

Jim Lee: Half Off at Nicelle Beauchene Gallery

January 5 to February 4, 2018

327 Broome Street, between Bowery & Chrystie Street

New York City, nicellebeauchene.com



Installation shot of the exhibition under review: Jim Lee: Half Off at Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York

Is painting in monochrome in 2018 retrograde? Jim Lee's solo exhibition *Half Off* at Nicelle Beauchene seems to suggest as much as it fixates on the absurdity of this investigation. Lee explicates the perverse nature of painting monochromes (or painting itself) through tongue-in-cheek illustration of them. The paintings become physical manifestations of his casual approach and slapstick process and efforts to undermine the stoicism historically found in painting.

Uneven in texture, saturation, and hue, Lee's paintings boast their apparent ineptitude: He unabashedly folds, staples, and tears lopsided seams, which feels irreverent given their nod to color-field abstraction

and notions of purity. This is made meaningful by Lee's use of different historically class-laden materials, such as oil paint and linen, intermixed with crass interlopers—Flashe, zone marking paint, visible staples, glitter, acrylic: lowbrow materials that feel deliberately applied to expensive supports that have been previously agitated and aggressively handled. The lowbrow materials occasionally impersonate highbrow ones or gesture over them, denouncing any aura of opulence implied by high quality. Lee's works are biting their thumb at the elitism and purity bound to the stuffy history of the monochrome.

Highlighting the texture of the raw canvas or the slick plastic sheen of acrylic, mimicry and illusionism in Lee's gestures double as surface depictions. Registered quickly for their tactile surface, their substance draws from deeper-rooted content, heavily contingent upon a viewer's diligence. That they ask for a patient and persistent viewer can be seen in the paintings' multifaceted intersections – these arise as time is spent with the works—whether between the digital and physical, humor and solemnity, elitism and the egalitarian. Lee's surface quality, materials, gestures, and handling juggle anecdotes of the heavy baggage paintings can carry.



Jim Lee, *Half Off (A Cream Divide)*, 2017. Acrylic medium, spray enamel, and staples on canvas and linen, 76 x 52 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York

Intentionally or otherwise, Lee's work often imitates the behavior or interaction a user has with an interface, such as manipulated screens that press against the picture plane and simultaneously recede into a deep space. *A Cream Divide*, split in half by conjoined canvas and linen, recalls a Photoshop preview dialogue box, de-saturating an image on the right half of its surface. The bright red panel on the left has a soft, blotchy red coating, unevenly mirrored by a seemingly darker red shaded by the underlying linen on the right panel. Similarly, in *Safety and Senegal*, Lee connects two distinct yellow surfaces of different prismatic intensity, sheen, and texture. Comprised of Flashe and zone marking paint, the lighter yellow intensified by its dark linen support, and conversely its light beige canvas, amplifies the deeper yellow. The physical and conceptual subtleties in Lee's work invite the viewer to spend time with them, contradicting our expedited relationships to the information available via the screens alluded to in some of his works. Other paintings, such as *Rutting Moon* and *Mr. Pleasant*, inch closer to a "truer" monochrome with only a single color applied scraggly to a cobbled surface, appearing simple but still jabbing at traditional color-field painting. Lee has provided his own bench from which viewers can fully absorb his faux monochromes. The same size as the paintings, the bench has printed on its seat a story from the artist's hometown about a peeping tom and inevitable chaos that ensued. There is humor in peering around seated visitors in an attempt to read the text, mimicking a peeping tom's mannerisms oneself. Looking back up at the paintings after reading the story feels like a violation of the paintings' and artist's privacy, and removes the deified objecthood to which works of art aspire. Paintings as an extension of oneself splayed out in a sterile gallery space is now re-imagined as unwelcome trespassing, but also realized as a necessary evil of continuing a sustainable art practice within a capitalist society. In this vein, the artist has provided a take home tee shirt emblazoned with the text "F♥CKER" for visitors to purchase. Who is the real fucker here?



Jim Lee, Untitled, 2018 (bench with printed text). Courtesy of the artist and Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York

The New York Times

ART & DESIGN

‘Jim Lee and the Cream Tones’

FEB. 26, 2015

Art in Review

By MARTHA SCHWENDENER

There have been many attempts over the years to merge painting and sculpture. Robert Rauschenberg’s combines — a neologism inspired by Alexander Calder’s mobiles — combined the two practices, while Donald Judd’s 1965 essay “Specific Objects” identified a similar hybrid strain in 1960s art. Jim Lee takes on the project with a certain humor and humility, acknowledging his predecessors but offering a subtle contemporary spin on the artistic impulse to remake or deconstruct mediums.

The show’s title, “Jim Lee and the Cream Tones,” sounds like a ’50s or ’60s pop ensemble, and Mr. Lee does use neutrally hued materials, punctuated with occasional bursts of color. Most of the works here are subtitled “Cream Tone,” and the show’s invitation, created by Mr. Lee, features a photograph of Gerhard Richter’s daughter pointing a gun in his studio, next to which Mr. Lee has digitally inserted one of his cream-colored creations.

Two-dimensional works — so, basically, paintings — are arranged in an eclectic grid on one wall. Mr. Lee makes subtle interventions in their patchwork geometries with staples, chalk and rubber, but some of the works veer into collage and sculpture, bubbling out from the wall like an old car fender or an organic protuberance. Other works verge more teasingly into sculpture. “Untitled (Cream Tone Construction)” (2014) is made of rubber, steel, wire and bungee cords and looks like buttocks jutting from the wall. It’s a curious object, but like most of Mr. Lee’s work, it’s so deadpan you’re not sure whether it’s a challenge or an anachronism, or just an antidote to our large-print, bold-statement art moment.

Nicelle Beauchene

327 Broome Street, Lower East Side

Through March 15

Art in America

Jim Lee

NEW YORK,

at Nicelle Beauchene
by Nora Griffin



“Jim Lee and the Cream Tones,” the artist’s third solo show of abstract paintings at Nicelle Beauchene, demonstrated the almost musical way in which Lee riffs on colors, forms and materials from one work to the next. Music has long been a touchstone for Lee, as evident in his exhibition titles and in the sway between dissonance and harmony in his work’s formal qualities. Lee’s 2007 exhibition “Altamont,” at Freight & Volume, explicitly referenced the 1969 rock-and-roll festival and its anarchic spirit with painting-

Jim Lee: *Untitled (Cream Tone #6)*, 2015, flashe paint on linen over wood, 69 by 48 by 8 inches; at Nicelle Beauchene.

object hybrids that had a commanding architectural presence. A gentler approach, signaled by the artist's deepening commitment to the two-dimensional, was introduced with this show's title, which called to mind the bouncy soulfulness of a Motown group.

The exhibition featured 14 large paintings (all 2015), and 23 small works (2014-15). One wall of the gallery was dominated by 10 paintings on linen (each 69 by 48 inches), divided into two rows. Composed of discrete sections of white, cream, gray, black and raw linen, the surfaces have simple divisions that form rectangles, triangles and more indeterminate shapes. The neutral palette was offset in certain works by areas of silver or red. In their scale and imagery, they seemed boldly semiotic, like flags, but also laboriously handmade. Among the materials used in various combinations are oil paint, acrylic, spray enamel, chalk, staples, rubber and collaged fabric. Attention flickers between surface and support, sides and edges.

Three of these canvases have distinctive armatures, which cause the paintings to bulge out in long, smooth curves on the left. Viewed from the side, *Untitled (Cream Tone #1)* reveals its hand-sawed skeleton. The painting's surface is divided vertically into bright white and cream white, a slight difference highlighted by a cluster of staples that create lines edging upward from the bottom to where the two tones meet. Unlike Ron Gorchov's shieldlike paintings that have symmetrical, finely crafted stretchers, these works eschew the sublime in favor of an irreverent humor.

Unconventional installation is a hallmark of Lee's practice. *Untitled (Cream Tone #13)* rests against the wall on top of two small, hand-sewn pillows. The presentation recalls Chris Ofili's use of hardened balls of elephant dung to support some of his paintings. Lee's canvas is also notable for its loosely stretched corners, giving the impression that the painting has thrown itself together in the

heat of the moment.

Toward the back of the gallery was a salon-style arrangement of small works on paper, card stock or wood. Most are contained in three-toned frames, which Lee had fabricated from his own designs, in black, white and light-colored wood, mirroring a color scheme employed in several of the large paintings. These works teeter between the formless and the biomorphic and are as seductively tactile as the paintings. They are usually one color, featuring brushy swatches of bubblegum pink (a color Lee favors), pale yellow, turquoise or dark green; sometimes paint obscures pencil lines and oily residues. One piece makes the personal nature of these abstractions explicit: *Untitled (Formal Issues)*, composed in oil, graphite and collage, features the artist's name in thick white script on a black background.

Jim Lee's work is a mongrel mix of American and European sensibilities in abstraction, evoking Minimalism and the gritty romanticism of Art Informel. There is an appealing material equality in paintings that merge the roughness of stitched and stapled fabric with delicate passages of oil paint and attention to support structures. The result is a punkish mindfulness that is entirely his own.

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MARCH 29 2013 : ART



JIM LEE at Nicelle Beauchene, New York

JIM LEE'S latest solo exhibition at *Nicelle Beauchene* tracks the evolution of material. The beautiful and well-conceived show suggests the fluidity between sculpture, painting, idea and form. The creative play on support and structure is a strong point in Lee's work and unifies the various media in the show. *Please Be Clean When You Do It* is on view through March 31st 2013 at *Nicelle Beauchene*, 327 Broome Street, New York. *Photo and text Juliana Balestin*

HUFFPOST ARTS & CULTURE

Please Be Clean When You Do It: Interview With Jim Lee

Posted: 03/25/2013 2:29 pm

Ridley Howard

Artist

Jim Lee was born in Berrien Springs, Michigan and received his MFA from the University of Delaware in 1996. His current show in New York at Nicelle Beauchene runs until March 31. We met and became good friends in early 2001, shortly after moving to the city. We recently caught up to discuss his ever-evolving work, interests and life outside of the studio.



Installation view, 2013, courtesy of Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York

Ridley Howard: I've known you and your work for over 10 years now--can you talk about how the language of your paintings has developed? In terms of early interests, minor and major shifts that have led you to where you are now.

Jim Lee: As you know, I have a pretty manic personality. The work seems to feed off of that. I'm rarely content and that moves the paint around. Early on, the work was heavily oriented towards the structure. Even the drawings were in relief. Cardboard assembled in a quasi-haphazard

fashion. The work was smallish in scale and I labored over a lot of minute details. At times, I felt like I had an idea of what each piece would look like before it was finished and I really didn't want that to be the situation.

I need to work and not really know that I am making anything in particular. I guess that's why I work on multiple pieces at the same time. It allows me to keep moving without focusing so much on the act of painting--in the end, I just want to make things. There shouldn't be any hierarchy in my process. Oil paint is no more important than latex, and linen is no more important than a piece of plywood. When I paint in this manner, the pieces become more interesting to me...I lose track of what is actually occurring.

Now it seems my painting is more traditional in terms of structure. Flat, lots of stretcher bars, canvas and linen. It's like the sanctity of the rectangle has won me over. All of this said, the work has basically remained about the same since the mid 90's. Looking back, I like what I was doing 10 years ago. It was a bit uglier, nastier and meaner.

You sort of mentioned this, but the structure and architecture of the paintings seems primary--structure as image/abstraction, structure of paint surface and stretcher, the architecture and space of the room. It all crumbles and materializes simultaneously.

For me, it's about staying engaged. The structure helps me to remain locked in. I try to slow people down...I want the viewer to discover things slowly; to have the paintings unveil themselves in a manner that takes time. I guess that's all part of it. The surface, stretcher, the environment--I want it all to be a factor. I imagine it being like when an athlete talks about the game slowing down... it's as if everything is functioning on the same level. I imagine it has something to do with confidence in one's approach.

Do you see your process as a kind of intervention? I've always thought about a Kelly-like elegance in tension with another disruptive energy.

That's funny. I like the term intervention when referring to my painting process. Sure, I guess there is a sort of intervention occurring. I just try to react off of things...marks on the painted surface, purposely warping a stretcher bar, cutting something then putting it back together. I want to create a scenario in which I have to fix something. In the end, I try to make a painting out of the happenstance that is part of the studio. And, over the years, I have tried to pare down the tools that I use. Having fewer tools forces me to make those decisions out of necessity. For a time, it felt like I was relying on the tools to inform what I would do next, and that seemed to inhibit my process. I had a big table saw that I would drag around with me from studio to studio. I built a giant table for it so I could roll it around, and it could easily rip a four by eight foot sheet of one-inch baltic birch. But in the end, I would be setting up all these jigs to make one or two cuts, and I would lose contact with the reality of the situation and it was like I was trying to make furniture. So, about 6 years ago, I just gave it away. I said to this guy I ran into in the neighborhood, if you can pick it up it's yours. He thought I was crazy, but was super excited to get it.

Art

Reviews

Jim Lee, "Woodshedding"

★★★★★

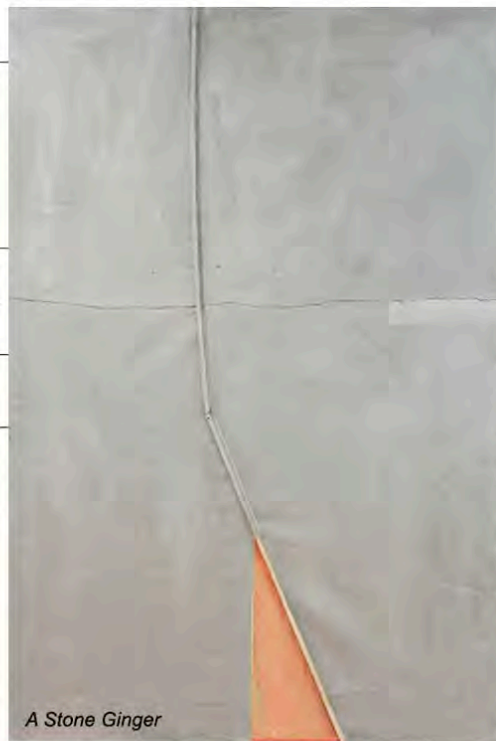
Nicelle Beauchene Gallery,
through Dec 5 (see Lower East Side)

Kudos to Jim Lee for coming up with a spot-on title for his irreverent group of paintings-as-objects—"Woodshedding," musicianspeak for practicing. Lee's work combines Robert Ryman's pared-down aesthetic with Steven Parrino's proclivity for contorted abstractions, revealing and reveling in offhand materials that are built up, piled on and otherwise juxtaposed in various stages of construction or deconstruction.

Untitled (You Pretty Thing)—

possibly named for David Bowie's "Oh! You Pretty Things!"—is a stack of drawings hung on a wall; they're wrapped in clear plastic and bound with strips of white duct tape that play hide-and-seek with delectably salmon-colored letters. *Untitled (Lou Reed Finish)*, a large monochromatic painting with a shiny, glam-rock-style silver coating, props up a warped all-white canvas tacked with a rectangle limned in pink.

Woodshedding is so-called for the



A Stone Ginger

ramshackle structures to which musicians have traditionally retreated to escape distraction. It's a fitting rubric for these pieces,

Edited by Howard Halle
art@timeoutny.com

created during a residency in the Catskills, but an equally suitable title would have been "Frankensteining": The artist's creations are not only made out of flotsam and jetsam, but are also haphazardly stitched, stapled, glued or held together by wire.

With 23 works stuffed into this tiny space, the show's a bit of an overload. But it contains many more hits than misses,

demonstrating Lee's carefully considered brand of formalism tinged with mischief.

—Nana Asfour

Jim Lee: Paranoid

by Craig Olson

Freight + Volume February 28, April 4, 2009

Any experienced coyote knows the only reasonable response to a trap is to dig it up, turn it over, and defecate on it. It's an offering to the trapper's pride, a piss stain on assumptions of rational authority. By confusing the roles of predator and prey, the coyote keeps things interesting, reminding us we're not the only beings with a sense of humor. Jim Lee's recent exhibition presents a similar situation. However, where the artist's work sits in relation to the aforementioned archetypes is unclear. Surely, deciding whether it's trap or trick (or painting with or without a capital P) seems decidedly foolish. It's the slippages in between that count.



Jim Lee, "Pierced (Ash&Tan)," (2008-09). Acrylic on wood. 13 x 32.5 x 10 in/ 33 x 82.6 x 25.4 cm.

As he did two years ago with his exhibition *Altamont* at this same venue, Lee deftly navigates that blurry edge between aesthetics, taste, form, and the evaluative criteria that we apply to art. Detritus, traditional art materials, and existing architectural elements are mixed into mostly unexpected combinations. These strange unions give rise to a host of conflicting ideas, to an edgy mentality where the certainty of our assumptions and the comfort of our logic is refuted. Is that a sculptural element or a gas pipe? Is that a pillow or a painting? Is that crumpled wrapper art? By incorporating objects into, and removing conventions from, the two worlds that govern this mindset - one of physical reality and post-consumer waste, and the other of abstract value and the significance we apply to it - Lee achieves a physical aporia, a trap of bafflement.

It's within this oxymoronic borderland that the artist has rebuilt the gallery space with his usual obtuse precision. A warped plywood wall is erected in the center of the space that holds a large canvas, "Quadraphobe" (2009). Its scraped and worked surface of light blue, white, and gray leads me to wonder whether the painting or the wall has any value without the support of the other. It presents an absolute contingency of contradictions within a context of equivocation. It's a hard pill to swallow, indeed. As is "Pierced (Ash&Tan)" (2008-09), a lozenge-shaped construction, half raw plywood, half ash gray, mimicking the small capsules of allopathic agent we ingest for all variety of symptoms. Protruding out of the left, gray half of the piece are five thin metal bars, non-uniform in length or arrangement. It suggests a

laceration of the imagination's esophagus, tough medicine that's humorous and wicked in its subversion of signs.

In these combinations of materials and implications, Lee creates a mental/visual feedback loop between the greater world outside and the formal aesthetics we use to make sense of its beauty. It's where the construction site and the garbage dump are twinned with the high ideals of aesthetic projection and formal arrangement. Their union birthed a strange mutation of art and life, schooled somewhere between the street and the studio. Confining this view to the simple dichotomy of high versus low art, or painting with or without a capital P, seems to me the wrong approach, or at least a narrow-minded one. The specters of high modernist thinking were present in this project from the beginning. Without their ghosts this transformation of material ideas isn't possible. Divination is only realized when some small part of the divined is allowed to enter. A little touch of evil for the greater good, or vice versa. It's in the contingency of these claims that this work lives, outside the traps of culture that claim aesthetic authority. In navigating this brumous borderland, illusion sinks below the threshold of consciousness and appears as truth, and we learn to flip the traps of culture with reflection rather than reflex.

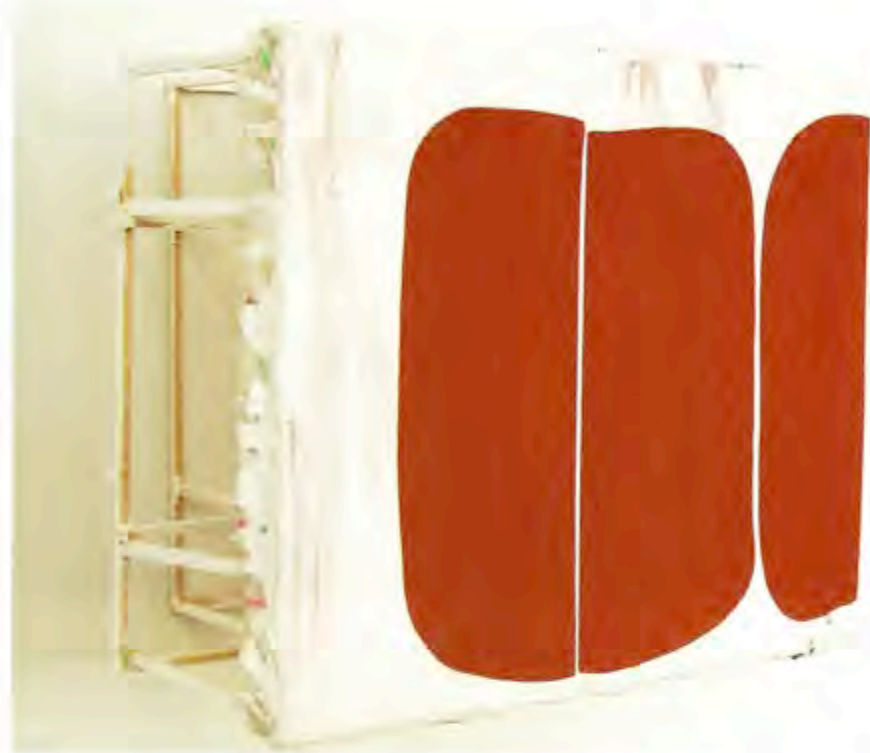
NEW YORK

Jim Lee

Freight + Volume

For his first New York solo exhibition, Jim Lee turned the gallery into an extension of his studio. Toward the front door, he built a temporary wall with two-by-three-inch studs and Sheetrock, leaving its wooden skeleton partially visible. This addition cut the usually rectangular space in half, creating a diagonal entrance hallway in which three-dimensional works were installed at all but standard viewing heights. The impact of this massive wall was immediate as it led viewers straight to the larger exhibition space, where the sculptures floated beyond the range of traditional placement. In fact, they needed to be discovered. Their unusual installation required viewers to gaze toward the ceiling or crouch on the floor. Carefully planned, this decision was intended to create what Lee considers most important—a rift between expectation and actual experience that establishes a general sense of improvisation.

Here lies the essence of Lee's ambition. His work, however carefully constructed, indeed aims to appear improvised, the aftermath of a spontaneous brainstorm. A scrap of wood, a splash of paint, a pencil-smudge, and a piece of plastic are fused into what at first can seem like a coincidental union of misfits. To a lay audience, Lee's work might feel thrown together and borderline absurd; but for those who explore shapes, lines, and formal relationships, it often contains an ingenious blend of wit, humor, and lightness. Lee proves that "easy" is hard. He shares this aesthetic with two other



Above: Jim Lee, *Rust/Slit*, 2007. Acrylic and Flashe paint, linen, and wood, 11.25 x 14.5 x 9.25 in. Below: Jim Shaw, *The Donner Party* (detail), 2003. Theater backdrop painting, 12 covered wagons, 27 tabletop sculptures, and vacuum, dimensions variable.

New York-based artists—James Hyde and Richard Tuttle—and continues in the tradition of certain late 1960s and '70s movements, including the Italian *Arte Povera*, the Dutch Zero, and the Düsseldorf circle around Joseph Beuys and Blinky Palermo. In this exhibition, he seeks a hide-away where flexibility and the possibility of constant transformation are not only embraced but revered. It is his version of a shrine dedicated to creative thought and development. During the opening, someone stumbled into *Pierced II* (2007), an oval chart with a vulnerable wooden stick poking into space, and broke the

stick. It was an accident, but an accidental chance set up by Lee. The physical contact and consequential alteration of the piece initiated a crucial dialogue. By no means does Lee encourage his audience to rip pieces off the wall, but he believes that the exchange between viewer and art should extend beyond the psychological to the physical.

This physical interaction is generally tamer. Pieces like *The Wood and the White* (2007), a triangular collage of wooden scraps protruding into space, force the viewer into close inspection. Shades of white paint cover the right edge as if it had

been dipped in whipped cream. Part workshop project, part delicious candy, the truth of the work is hiding beneath the surface. Peeking behind the solid triangular shield, one is astonished to find that it is supported only by elegantly thin stilts: a fragile soul beneath solid armor.

—Stephanie Buhmann

Sculpture May 2008

The New York Times

June 15, 2007

Museum and Gallery Listings

By THE NEW YORK TIMES

ART

★ **JIM LEE: 'ALTAMONT'** This young artist takes tips from lots of approved sources — Robert Ryman, Richard Tuttle and Ellsworth — but has some ideas of his own about the art and craft of building paintings and the play between the literal and the visual. The smaller works tend to be better because they are more complicated, but on the whole, and as a whole, the show is a beautiful start. Freight & Volume, 542 West 24th Street, Chelsea, (212) 989-8700, volumegallery.com; closes tomorrow. (Smith)

Art in America

INTERNATIONAL • REVIEW



Jim Lee at Freight + Volume

Art in America, Dec, 2007 by Charles Dee Mitchell

In an exhibition filled with works that hovered somewhere between painting and sculpture, it seemed appropriate that the extra wall Jim Lee added to the gallery's interior could almost be mistaken for one of the works itself. Placed a few feet to the right of the entrance, it reached almost to the ceiling and angled slightly to the left, creating a wide but narrowing foyer and functioning as a support for the show's works. The end farthest from the door remained unfinished in a calculated way, exposing the 2-by-4s under the white drywall surface. Lee's small, shaped, largely monochromatic works both hung on and leaned against the wall, arranged in a seemingly offhand manner that ensured you inspected the entire surface, top to bottom, front and back. Hybrid (2006), a 13-by-12-inch construction of latex-coated canvas on a delicate wooden support, whose title could apply to the contents of the entire exhibition, hung so high on the wall's unfinished corner that it took the checklist to alert the viewer to its presence.

There is nothing simple about Lee's unassuming objects. *Deep(er) Bark(er)*, 2007, is a black monochrome oil on a piece of plywood that would have been about 30 inches square were it not notched and angled along one side. The shape suggests the wood is a castoff from a construction site, but many layers of paint, sanded and reapplied, give it a dense, dignified surface, while a small border of white ground keeps it floating slightly away from the wall. *Pierced II* (2007) is an irregular disk pieced together from Sintra, a plastic material, and painted several shades of foamy green. The tiny wooden dowels that pierce its surface prove to be part of an elaborate but fragile construction that pushes it away from the wall. The 8-foot-tall white painting *Yonder Away* (2007) dominated the space, its surface disturbed by irregular stretchers that caused bulges and contortions. The scale suggested a fantasy of stepping into the work, but the restlessness of the surface encouraged the viewer to stand back.

Stand back, come close, look behind: from the minute the viewer entered the space, Lee orchestrated the way the installation was experienced. His vision is humorous and brainy, giving rise to sophisticated and engaging objects.