

Art in America

B. WURTZ WHITE FLAG PROJECT



Photo: B. Wurtz: Untitled, 2003, wood, plastic bags, plastic, wire, pushpins, 42 by 25 by 11 1/2 inches; at White Flag Projects.[find this](#)

ST. LOUIS B. Wurtz, who has created found-object assemblages for the past four decades, has recently received much praise as an under-recognized master, and this exhibition further justified the accolades. Unlike his breakthrough 2011 show at Metro Pictures in New York—a dense and nearly exhaustive survey—this selection of works dating from 1970 to the present comprised only four wall pieces, seven sculptures and a vinyl banner of collaged imagery that hung on the gallery's facade. Each work inside the spacious venue was given ample room and thus resonated on its own, intimate terms.

In *Three Blue Mops* (1986), three blue mop handles are affixed to an otherwise empty wood frame in an even, vertical row. In an untitled piece from 1980, an open red binder dangles from threads looped to a narrow strip of wood, the metal three-ring spine facing outward. And in a 2010 work, clear plastic pint cups, upturned, support a gray-painted trapezoidal box, upon which grocery coupons are pasted. Another single cup, off center, sits atop the assemblage.

Many of these sculptures are placed directly on the floor, emphasizing their modest feel. Pieces of white-painted and raw wood, for instance, are arranged on the ground like Lincoln logs in *The Big Silence* (2003), hoisting up a fan-shaped array of what look like rain-corroded aluminum megaphones. The corners of the wooden base are topped with four empty tuna-type cans, which echo the matte gray of the horns; the corners of the horn bundle are accented with tied pieces of white checkered cloth, which echo the white-painted wood.

An untitled, wall-mounted piece from 1996 has the compositional effect of a provisional abstract painting, though its elements are not painted. The central component is a rectangle of raw wood, with a small black carpet sample perched on its upper edge. A wire that sprouts from the same edge supports a dangling black string onto which a black sock is knotted, its limp form appearing like a loose brush mark against the wood background.

Binders, tuna cans, socks, found wood, cloth and wire—Wurtz's work speaks for itself in a direct language, relying on the most minimally orchestrated of physical engagements. Form is arrived at through gravity (as when a string droops from a hook) or through the properties of the materials in themselves (as when upturned plastic bags serve as balloonlike accents), while the mere tying of a knot connects one part to another. Observing the work—which abstains from overt representation or meaning—trains one to see things more crisply and demands a sustained, thoughtful encounter with the usually disposable. Wurtz nudges us to inhabit each living moment with more esthetic attentiveness and to find the poetic potential in the everyday.