

**NEW YORK**

**Jim Osman**

**Lesley Heller Workspace**

In a very smart show, Jim Osman has taken the cast-offs of his earlier projects in wood and stacked them together to create frontally oriented, open sculptures. The seemingly off-

**Sculpture** 32.6



hand manner in which he fashions his square or rectangular constructions belies their sophistication. Given as they are to an agreeably rough presentation, it would be easy to see his works as entirely improvisatory; close inspection, however, reveals a sharp formal intelligence at work. Osman looks for ways to tweak or skew the formal plane that faces us, using paper to add color to structural components that range from small blocks to planks of wood. In consequence, he foregrounds the detritus of the studio and street in order to construct complex, intelligently designed assemblages. Both the tabletop sculptures and the one big piece in the show allude to David Smith's "Cubi" series without succumbing to his influence.

The work clearly develops from an additive process. *Compass* (2013), a comparatively epic work among the smaller sculptures, consists of an open square with a rectangle on top, delineated by long planks and blocks of wood colored by paint or laminated paper. Its seemingly ad-

hoc, of-the-moment energies make it pleasingly improvisatory; the viewer is encouraged to stand facing either side of the open spaces (its sides are of lesser interest). The depth of *Compass* shows us that Osman is careful to build a work whose implications draw us into a genuinely three-dimensional space. Our practical knowledge of the sculpture enables us to follow him in his explorations of the *depth* of what is essentially a forthright, frontal plane. This is where Osman's work differs from Smith's: the "Cubi" sequence demonstrates a nearly painterly, two-dimensional reality. By making historically aware high culture from throwaway materials, Osman presents a contrast that feels very contemporary even as he looks back on sculptural tradition.

The smaller works achieve their effects in similar ways. *Stack 1*

**Above:** Jim Osman, *Stack 1*, 2012. Gouache, paper, and wood, 9 x 9 x 7.5 in. **Right:** Wang Xieda, *Sages' Sayings 026*, 2006. Bronze, 37 x 33.5 x 11.75 in.

BOTTOM: © WANG XIEDA, COURTESY JAMES COHAN GALLERY, NY AND SHANGHAI