



Above: Ming Fay, *Altar*, 2010. Mixed media, installation view. Right: Martha Walker, *Dance of the Spirits*, 2009. Puddled steel, 47 x 14 x 13 in.

place him as an artist of ongoing achievement. Part of the main gallery looked to the rounded, breast-like forms found in many of his installations. Together, these works engaged the viewer with idiosyncratic charm. The brightly colored globes suspended from the ceiling played off certain aspects of traditional Chinese folk arts, but at the same time, they remained rough shapes hung on different lengths of wire. Like the artist himself, they have survived the contingencies of New York City's street life and art world.

Fay is less concerned with urban harshness than he is with natural lyricism. The exhibition featured a lovely tree rising gracefully, its branches ending in circular, green paper leaves. This simple, yet affecting work highlights the fragility of nature, which persists in the face of indifference and destructive human activity. Its poetic beauty quietly implies that there is an ethic to our perception of natural forms: we

must care for what we see around us. The tangled knots of branches and roots in another part of the main room engaged in a linear series of relations like a three-dimensional drawing. Finally, the joyful, slightly chaotic installation in the back room consisted of an inspired hodgepodge of ephemera: a drawing of a green praying mantis, a bird drawn in black, photos of the artist as a young man. This good-humored, spirited show presented the products of Fay's gifted imagination—a creativity interested in what the world has to offer, with a respect for past forms and ideas.

—Jonathan Goodman

NEW YORK
Martha Walker
Kouros Gallery

Martha Walker's sculpture poses apparent contradictions. She attempts to sculpt subconscious, political, and microbiological themes in puddled steel, building each work

by dripping steel rods onto a frame. Her process produces surfaces ranging from smooth to lumpy, which gives the steel both a human touch and some unpredictability. *Hourglass*, one of three puddled steel works installed at the entrance to her recent show, interpreted a beautiful form, but I did not understand Walker's evocation of "human and planetary existence," as stated in the press release.

A tall, slender platform in a second-floor gallery supported *Pacific Crater* (2003), a 16-inch-diameter sphere. Its partially scooped-out interior forms a microcosm of the ocean's inner rhythms and movement, while the textured surface suggests many correspondences—from earth to skin to ocean. *The Survivors* (2008) consists of lumpy scabs of steel, each scarred column



containing little keyholes of light. The title suggests the Holocaust and other horrific tragedies.

In *The Secret Spot* (2007), an eight-legged, octopus-like form wraps its twisting limbs around a large ball in its central cavity. The textures on the insides of each "leg" are markedly pronounced, while the outer skin is smoother than the surface of *Pacific Crater*. I never discovered the "secret" of the title.

Five accompanying pen and ink drawings demonstrated Walker's meticulous use of short lines to create circular life forms. In *From the Heart* (2009), a series of variously colored, concentric circles are immersed in a deep black, intensely textured field. Even though I was not captivated by every work, *Pacific Crater* and *The Survivors* show Walker's strengths and promise as a sculptor.

—Jan Garden Castro

PHILADELPHIA

"Embracing the Uncarved Wood"

Leonard Pearlstein Gallery, Drexel University

The carved wood reliefs created by the True Words Studio collective in Shandong, China, have a formidable, yet mysterious presence. Some suggest puzzles, others esoteric games, and still others, unexplored terrain. The iconography is distinctive, and the skilled and imaginative carving techniques present an exhaustive exploration of the medium.

"Embracing the Uncarved Wood," which was first shown at the Phillips Museum of Art at Franklin and Marshall College in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, rewarded the efforts of its Chinese and American sponsors by increasing the visibility of a unique group of artists living in modest obscurity outside the mainstream art world. Under normal circumstances, the highly skilled members of True Words, who have been deaf since birth or early childhood, would use their talents in factory



production, but two professors at a vocational institute in Shandong inspired them to use their traditional craft skills in the service of self-expression. These teachers, Xhou Ning and Xiao Yixia, offered practical as well as artistic guidance and helped the group to establish a self-sufficient studio in the rural countryside.

Many of the collective's members tap their personal roots to access universal themes. Their imagery becomes especially powerful in conjunction with carving techniques developed to release the physical and material secrets of the wood itself. Zhang Haiyang, for instance, coaxes wood into thin, elaborately woven lines that recall the fishing nets of his native village. In the "Dance of Lines" series, the knots and tangled strands break free to

create new configurations, becoming characters from an esoteric language.

Zhang Guoli pushes the limits of bas-relief in *Sons No. 3* by creating densely packed, interlocking and overlapping figures. With limited negative space, the entwined figures become interdependent, as well as anonymous. In *Memory of the Door No. 5*, planar surfaces create a tilted perspective that smoothly integrates a close-up, interior view of a room with flat images of fish and outdoor views through a window. Ma Yandong exploits the cracks, fissures, and dark surfaces of oxidized wood in his abstract forms, while Li Weidong concentrates on contrasting textures in his finely tooled geometric shapes emerging from roughly hacked backgrounds. Liu Chunhua, the only female artist

Zhang Haiyang, *Dance of Lines No. 7*, n.d. Wood, 25.25 x 25.75 in. From "Embracing the Uncarved Wood."

in the True Words Studio, ties the surface features of wood to its source by simulating landscapes of various terrains.

The mark of the hand is everywhere in these works, and true to classical Chinese tradition, no mistakes are permitted at any point in the development of the completed sculptures. Having received limited training, the True Words members are technically neither folk nor outsider artists; instead, they are indicative of another class of artists who set themselves apart from art world concerns, stretching minimal resources to their maximum potential in order to develop unique personal vocabularies.

—Leslie Kaufman