

frieze

Manfred Pernice

Anton Kern Gallery, New York, USA

Manfred Pernice could be called a memorialist of the forgettable. This makes him an apt if obvious choice for the New Museum's current 'Unmonumental' exhibition, but renders his new show, 'diary,' at Anton Kern curiously anomalous. It seems unusual, after all, that an artist known for refiguring the quotidian and anonymous structures of modernism should fly under such an ostensibly autobiographical banner.

Constructed with Pernice's usual tenderness for chipboard, 14 sculptures are arranged on 40 honeycomb-shaped platforms that abut to form a multi-leveled stage. All but one of the structures bear a date marked with vinyl numerals. These dates continue in the second room with the installation *diary*, consisting of 14 drawings, three walls murals suggestive of oversized Richard Tuttle paintings, and one sculpture. Metal arabesques rise from the latter work's busy collection of cracker boxes, which are also dated. The idiosyncrasy of these dates is emphasized by a pocket booklet of photographs that accompanies the exhibition, in which dates on the sculptures reappear besides the images, occasionally paired an anecdote, such as, 'Bowling night with friends... all 'took turns' drinking Coke-Kümmerling...' The same images and captions turn up again as DIY folding paper sculptures, though this time they are mismatched – as though to coyly remind us that, so far as interpreting these dates go, we're on our own.

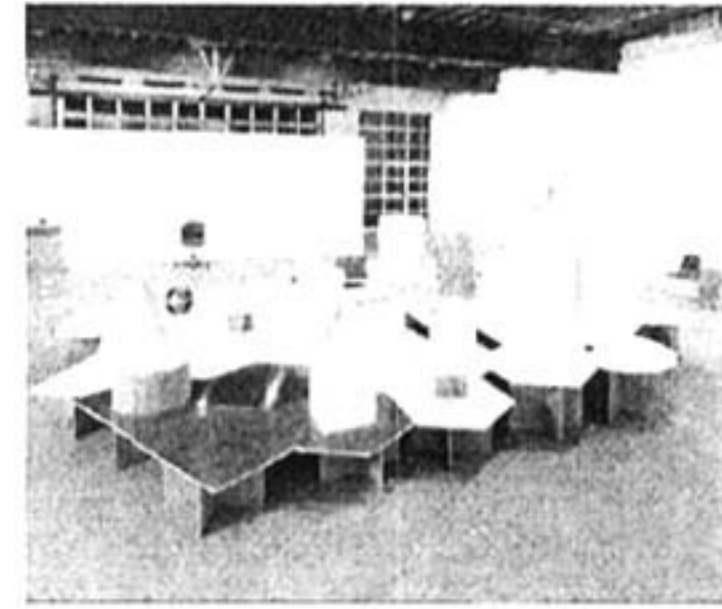
Pernice keeps the biographical information to a minimum, while grounding his forms in architectural motifs usually consigned to the margins of our attention. The sculptures on the platforms recall concrete balusters shifted off their axis and planters faceted with lacquered chipboard. Moreover, they echo the socles of Brancusi, had they been relegated to city plazas; like Brancusi's, Pernice's plinths vacillate between art objects and support structures. Arranged on the platform, which resembles a stage for an open-air theatre, they become the antic performers of their own 'supporting' roles.

The 40 platforms that compose this stage are in fact the conjunction of 14 separate works doled out in an expanded game of tangrams: three cells to each of 13 purchasers and one cell to the remaining buyer. The open anonymity of a public plaza is confronted with its imminent 'privatization' and the slim hope that someday they might be reunited, in the manner of Jonathan Monk's

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Published on 20/03/08

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distributed puzzle pieces. What distinguishes Pernice's platforms from a puzzle, however, is their modularity; there is no inherent 'completeness' to the collection of platforms, just as there is no clear reference for the forms upon them. Their formal and imaginative versatility enables them to shift out of any single interpretation of how they fit into a world of real memories or, indeed, real monuments.

Even those sculptures that directly take up the forms of Pernice's choice memorialist, Austrian sculptor Fritz Wotruba, then transmute these forms into the over-familiar shapes of civic architecture. Tacking dates onto these shapes, which are On Kawara-esque markers of time that double as memorials to forgetting, Pernice underlines the obscurity of all monuments. By attaching a date of personal importance to a generic form, Pernice allegorizes the character of monuments as testaments not to remembrance but to our inability to recall – memorializing the memorials we never remembered in the first place.

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