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Phoebe Washburn at LFL

Phoebe Washburn creates low-tech, room-size sculptures made up of a great many units of slightly varying appearance. Her rippling structures appear to be arrived at by chance but also rely on some tricky engineering. For her second New York solo, she offered *Nothing's Cutie* (2004), a mixed-medium work chiefly built up of vertically massed strips of wood often painted light pink, yellow, green, blue or orange.

Upon entering the gallery, visitors had the option to pass under one side of the structure. From this vantage point, much of the technique that went into the work was in evidence. Surprisingly, only a small percentage of the slender elements reached down to the floor, while the majority of the tightly bolted-together slats and planks held each other in place in midair. Entire clusters of painted wood strips were raised off the ground by a pair of precariously positioned folding tables.

Eventually, viewers could discover that most of the structure, some of which reached almost to the ceiling, was anchored to the two piers in the main space of the gallery.

On the other side of the moderately dark and treacherous passageway underneath the sculpture, which featured simulacra of stalactites and makeshift implements left in plain sight, came a light-filled area—above ground, as it were. Here, the construction turned into steep, hilariously faceted hillsides and valleys punctuated with abstracted buildings. The effect was reminiscent of the haphazardly arranged, pastel colored houses that fill one's field of vision when driving into San Francisco from the south.

The illusion Washburn obtains through the abstract geometric means of painted wood slats, she also disrupts by incorporating into her sculpture large rolls of tape and containers filled with screws. In addition, pencils are wedged upright between bundles of slats. Two small fields of sawdust in the middle of the piece establish sandy beaches of sorts. Animated by Washburn's free-wheeling virtuosity and dreamy sense of play, this space-engulfing sculpture seemed arbitrarily contained by the walls of the gallery. Theoretically, it could have gone on and on.

—Michaël Amy

Phoebe Washburn: *Nothing's Cutie*, 2004, painted wood, pencils, sawdust, nails, chairs, tables and mixed mediums; at LFL.



Amy, Michael, "Phoebe Washburn at LFL", Art in America, January 2005, p. 117