

KANTOR / FEUER GALLERY

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Reviews

Aaron Spangler
Zach Feuer Gallery (LFL), through
Sat 26
(see Chelsea).

The American Civil War took place so long ago that images of its battles now appear almost as nostalgic as they do horrific. What such a domestic war might look like today is the subject of Aaron Spangler's wood carvings. Colored a somber black, they portray scenes of combat unfolding under a magnificent forest canopy. Aside from a few mutilated bodies, Spangler avoids Goya-like grotesqueries by visiting most of his atrocities on the physical symbols of rural American values: home, church and town hall.

Perhaps because they're monochrome, the carvings don't convey movement very convincingly; when a truck hauls away piles of banned books or a biplane heads straight for us, the scenes remain static. In contrast, over-size trees and enormous shafts of wheat are vibrantly alive, to the point that they dominate the work. Although the battles Spangler carves out have clearly damaged the landscape, the surviving inhabitants—presumably the

victors—nonetheless maintain a symbiotic relationship with nature, as suggested in *Sniper's Lair* (2004), where the sinister, snaky branches of a massive tree are echoed in the absent sniper's whip. Similarly, a huge, dramatic sword poised in the sky and a giant tree branch form a cross in *Race Among Ruins* (2004).

As Spangler invokes the recent red state–blue state conflict in America's heartland, he is strikingly unsentimental in imagining the region's savage destruction. The real intrigue in his carvings is not bipartisan factionalism—it's his vision of life after the onset of war as back-to-the-land survival of the fittest.—*Merrily Kerr*



Aaron Spangler, *Sniper's Lair*, 2004–5.

Kerr, Merrily, "Aaron Spangler", Time Out New York, February 24 - March 2, 2005, p. 72