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MAILINGLIST

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CARL BOUTARD *Life is Elsewhere*

by Jonathan Goodman

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Swedish-born, Berlin-based sculptor Carl Boutard is currently living in New York City on a residency at the International Studio & Curatorial Program (ISCP). His exhibition, *Life is Elsewhere*, installed in the long, somewhat narrow space of TURN Gallery, consists of eight sculptures made from paper and cardboard, rather than the bronze and wood he usually works with for both indoor sculpture and outdoor projects. In today's market, using such ephemeral materials, Boutard—and the gallery—are taking a chance, but the decision is successful: *Life is Elsewhere* (the title is a reference to his stay abroad) is a terrific show, one of the most interesting and accomplished exhibitions I have seen in some time. His mostly geometrical, but also organically formed, sculptures maintain a presence that extends beyond the Arte Povera materials he makes use of. Usually the general configuration of the sculptures is geometric and abstract, built from individual cardboard modules that are pieced together to construct a circle or an overlapping, twisting, and turning form. During a conversation with Boutard in the gallery, he explained that the cardboard boxes come from a yogurt company located in the same building where he works. As the press release notes, this exchange supports a sustainable economy and local exchange of materials.

Walking into the gallery space, the viewer faces *The Engine Near* (2015), a large, open circle constructed of cardboard and covered with white paper. Supporting it is an ordered set of recycled, flattened boxes, used to ship the yogurt containers, which are held together with a thin strip of wood. The boxes raise the ring roughly four feet into the air; through the open space of the circle, which is reminiscent of similarly shaped constructions in Chinese gardens, the convoluted light green sculpture, titled *Daydreaming about Dogs* (2016) becomes apparent. *The Engine Near*'s circular form is constructed from folded cardboard, while the geometric, triangular



Installation view: Carl Boutard, *Life is Elsewhere*, Turn Gallery, New York, February 24 to April 10, 2016. Courtesy Turn Gallery.

components of *Daydreaming about Dogs* folds in and out, shifting in shape in response to the audience's movement. In the show's well-planned installation, it sits in the middle of the room, with a white cord tied to the wall and to the sculpture to keep it secure. Both works demonstrate a feeling for monumentality that is in keeping with Boutard's several large, public art projects. Despite the impoverished materials, or perhaps because of their use, both pieces offer an elegance and balance of creativity and the mathematical use of form.

Richard Deacon, the British sculptor, is a favorite artist of Boutard, whose work shows some influence by the former. One of the most interesting and beautiful pieces in the show is called *Six Months Later* (2016), a tulip-shaped work, made of paper on cardboard, painted blue, and supported by a stick of wood made stable by screws in the floor. Inside the flower-like bell form of the sculpture, the cardboard attains a soft, luminous brown. *Six Months Later* evidences Boutard's penchant for the organic, displayed in such a way that nature is lyrically evoked. Despite the mathematical bent of many of the sculptures' components, which accumulate and build the entire form, Boutard is an artist who is clearly interested in the relations between art and nature. He is not so much a formalist as he is a creator of shapes that might function as the illustration of mathematical ideas or the demonstration of the esthetic beauty of nature's own constructions. Traditionally, art describes nature while portraying its artistic capacity for form. In the case of *Six Months Later*, we see a work moving upward at an angle, providing Boutard's audience with a reference that appears to have come directly from nature. But like all the work in the show, this piece is measured and precisely restrained in the sense that it is bound by the internal processes of its making, which of course are culturally oriented.

Finally, two small pieces bear mentioning. *A Better Place* (2016), made with paper on cardboard, is a convoluted white work tied together rather like an infinity strip. It is attached to the wall, whose smooth finish nicely contrasts with the bends and turns of the cardboard. All of Boutard's art is deeply sculptural, and *A Better Place* is no exception, being a kind of low relief accentuated by the twists of the material. Not as formally precise as the works described above, it nonetheless accommodates a meditation on the relation between natural and manmade form. *On Everything* (2016) is the most direct sculpture in the show. Made with paper on cardboard, two boxes sitting on top of each other are outlined within internal sides by white stripes, with a white, vertical rectangle in the center of both. It is a contained piece of work that extols simplicity and a manner that refutes any complexity of motive. Interestingly, both *A Better Place* and *On Everything* demonstrate Boutard's penchant for understatement, which results in expressions of unusual interest. Sculpture doesn't have to be overly intricate to be interesting, and Boutard proves this exceptionally well.

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