

Carl Suddath: New Work at Lawndale Art Center

September 23rd, 2007 – Bill Davenport



Suddath's new work is a folded geometric toy made from rusted pipe outside Lawndale's back door. Half plop-art and half industrial relic, it balances uneasily with doodle-like casualness, a little bit like a lot of things, but not much like anything. Brief images of a crashed TIE fighter, a sailboat, or an origami duck slide off the piece's self-contained aloofness. The piece is willfully non-objective, even it's distorted geometry defies easy categorization. Like steel sudoku, it contains the beginnings of familiar geometric shapes with gaps left for us to complete. You start to build a hexagon, pyramid or tetrahedron in your mind, only to have it wiggle loose. It reminds me of a taxidermy lamp I once saw of a mongoose battling a cobra.

That said, the piece *ought* to be old hat, but it's not. Recent art has spent a lot of time deconstructing modernism, but this is too close for comfort. I spent a half hour trying to decide what made this piece any different from another pipe sculpture piece in the MFAH Sculpture garden:



I like both pieces, but it's fascinating how, within such a limited formal vocabulary, Suddath's piece manages to have a postmodern, tentative feeling so different from the optimistic modernism of the red thing (still don't know the artist's name, sorry). Of course, one is shiny red, one is rusty, but it goes deeper; the red piece, for all it's complexity, is essentially lawful, rule-based. Pipes shall lean at the specified angles, consistent spacing shall be maintained. Within the rigid rules the artist has set for himself, he strives to

create dynamism. It's essentially machine art. Suddath's piece, for all its sharp points and industrial technique, is softer, slower, and less definite. It's not surprising it's only the first element in of an ongoing multi-month installation.



One of the most curious features of this piece was the inconsistency of the welding. Like most of the joints (and this piece is all about joints) the central nexus was immaculate, ground down into a complex organic merge that adds greatly to the piece's mysterious purposefulness, but a couple other joints were spattered and sloppy. Judging from his other work, Suddath is a careful craftsman; I've got to assume those joints are messy on purpose, but it sure doesn't look it. I especially like the way the ground-down steel rusts differently from the rest, it underlines Suddath's precise sense of when it's time for finicky finish, and when to let well enough alone.