

DUNCAN JOHNSON
ATLANTA

Duncan Johnson's exhibition *New Work and Palimpsest Portraits* by Neil Fried and Monica Duncan address the internal logic of one medium in terms of another [Marcia Wood Gallery; September 10—October 17, 2009]. Johnson presents painted panels composed of thin strips of reclaimed wood found near his Vermont home. Lined up like a jigsaw puzzle, the strips are fastened together with a matrix of tiny, shiny nails. A new direction for Johnson, who previously constructed wooden sculpture, this work was inspired by architecture and by his fascination with patterns. Most of the panels are composed of vertical pieces of wood that were previously painted or stained. The artist works intuitively, selecting each piece as he would select hues of paint from a palette. Instead of painting colored stripes, Johnson carefully fits together his painted wooden strips. From a distance, for example, *Longitude*, 2008, looks like pale vertical stripes painted over a syncopated collage of earth tones and deeper blues and reds. In *Longitude III*, 2009, the earth tones have largely given way to pastels with bold turquoise, orange, and yellow accents in a vertical pattern punctuated by a row of pale rectangles suspended across the middle of the picture plane. Tiny silver brad head nails create a regular pattern that shimmers across the surface of both panels, providing a sparkling contrast to the rustic reclaimed wood. In the lower third of *Waterline*, 2009, uniform strips of varying shades of blue align below alternating pale and dark rectangular bands to resemble water under a pier. The waterline is punctuated at irregular intervals by darkly painted narrow strips, disrupting the illusion and calling attention to the constructed nature of the work.

Johnson's new works are paintings in the same way that Robert Rauschenberg's combine paintings of the late 1950s were. Though emphatically assembled out of wood, they are composed according to the intuitive logic of abstract painting. When asked what he would do if the surface of one of his constructed paintings were damaged, the artist became perplexed—to repair the damage by applying paint would violate the logic of assemblage upon which these found object "paintings" are based.

—Diana McClintock

