

BRIDGETTE **MAYER** GALLERY

"Sculptures with a logic all their own"

Jerry Cullum - Special

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Let it first be said that the wood sculptures of New York artist Duncan Johnson are well-nigh breathtaking. They may cause some momentary confusion, because what at first appear to be forms hacked and chopped from chunks of wood turn out to be, instead, enormous numbers of small rectangles of softwood, held firmly in place by even more enormous numbers of very tiny, evenly spaced nails.

In fact, with one exception, Johnson's pieces in this exhibition are nailed to an armature of shaped strips of plywood that have in fact been hand-worked by Johnson as the underpinnings for a surprisingly light evocation of mass. He achieves a considerable range of effects within this unconventional way of making wood sculpture, from the wavy, off-balance gracefulness of "Stand" to the rougher-edged beauty of any number of other wall or floor pieces.

The uneven, stair step effect of many of the pieces is a little reminiscent of parallel contour lines on topographical maps, but even that is a misleading comparison. These are, quite simply, abstract forms with their own internal logic, and they give pleasure for that very reason.

"Seven C" stands out as an exception to the general cragginess, being a sort of empty-centered mandala based on oval forms. "Cleft," the only sculpture here with a solid core, shows the more naturalistic references from which Johnson's current abstractions sprang; not only is this wall piece more sinuously curved and stained a darker brown to suggest hardwood, but cut-off stubs of branches protrude from openings in the surface.

There is a simplicity of form within this complex variety that many viewers should find unusually attractive.

Jerry Cullum is an Atlanta writer and the senior editor of Art Papers, a magazine of contemporary art.