

## Gedi Sibony

### *My Arms Are Tied Behind My Other Arms*

Contemporary Art Museum, St Louis

23 January – 19 April

Much of what Gedi Sibony has done in this radiantly beautiful exhibition is so subtle, it almost escapes notice. In one gallery, for example, he shortens a black curtain to reveal two panes of a clerestory. And throughout, he installs his pieces so that correspondences between material and form – remnants of carpet or shoddy plasterboard doors, say – create triangular relationships across the exhibition space. Such moves pull the eye away from his own work and lead it around the broad proportions of Brad Cloepfil's much-praised architecture – which to Sibony's credit comes off as sublimely balanced rather than elegant and cold.

The subtle understanding of structure and space which underlie the installation carries through to Sibony's choice and use of materials: distressed elements from the built environment which are used, in general, to define its limits or determine its structure. *She Replied Instantly* (2009), which hangs alone in a chapel-like room, is composed of two-by-fours that recall the roughed out framing of a wall. Behind it, a plastic sheet is bunched like a billowing curtain in a Renaissance painting. In (XXXX) (2005) he tweaks two remnants of industrial carpet so they appear to kiss (hence the pun of the title). But critically, he's flipped them, exposing their gridded undersides and drawing attention to what usually remains unseen or unnoticed.

In using worn, often beat-up objects – he even appropriates a scuffed and dented Masonite board from the museum's education department – Sibony seems to celebrate a kind of random beauty resulting from use, emphasising the little details we tend to dismiss as scuffs and stains, but which, as much as anything, define the character and function of built space. His sculptures, like the beauty marks worn by flappers in the 1920s, rely on these little imperfections to highlight the greater whole which contains them.

Formal and conceptual precedents abound, from Richard Tuttle's humble wood slats that energise entire walls to Gordon Matta-Clark's heroic interventions in derelict buildings – an aesthetic for the abandoned which Sibony seems to breathe. His understanding of materials, process and architectural space also reflect Barry Le Va, Richard Serra and Vito Acconci, the latter down to his use of wooden boards. But Sibony may also be poking fun at these precedents. A door topped by a wiglike sheet of crinkled paper seems to take the piss out of John McCracken's elegant resin monoliths.

More cogently, Sibony flips this last gasp of Modernism into a reflection on the diminished expectations and cracked walls that have always existed beneath the American dream of enduring prosperity. Indeed, his work recalls the boards nailed over the windows of the derelict mansions in the neighbourhood around the museum, wooden rectangles which make these buildings seem all the more grand for their decay. As such, his work is about what is there in front of one's eyes, a new realism for today. *Joshua Mack*



*My Arms Are Tied Behind My Other Arms*, 2009  
(installation view).  
Photo: Gedi Sibony