

Art in America

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View of Carol Hepper's exhibition, showing *Blister Pack* (foreground), 2008, mixed mediums, 80 by 57 by 77 inches; at Ramis Barquet. (Review on p. 186.)

Carol Hepper Ramis Barquet

Though it sustains longstanding inclinations, Carol Hepper's work has taken a sharp turn with the recent sculptures in this exhibition, her first at the gallery (and her first solo show in New York since 2000). A new studio in rural upstate New York and a residency at Pilchuck, the glassmaking mecca outside Seattle, have contributed to the change. While continuing to rely on organic materials—now untrimmed branches and milled lumber rather than the dried fish skins with which she worked for several years—Hepper has adopted a decidedly irreverent posture toward nature's bounty. Unlike the fish skins, which are painted in ways that enhance without altogether falsifying their original coloration, the new sculptures flaunt colors—at the cut ends of branches and twigs—that are just short of psychedelic. Similarly, while standard-issue hardware (C-clamps, single coil springs) are not new to Hepper's work, their rampant proliferation is. And the stint at Pilchuck provided an entirely new range of forms, ranging from chastely biomorphic to frankly sensual.

Around a Square (2006), an irregular wreath of cut branches painted a spry lime green, each linked to the next by a coiled metal connector, has the lively but wholly abstract energy of her previous work in metal pipe. At the other end of the spectrum, *She* (2008) is almost comically erotic, its three-legged wooden armature supporting a buxom, gleaming heap of pink blown glass. A furry hank of bison pelt dangles beneath the glass, pink foam dripping down its sides. More typical of Hepper's new sculptures is the conjunction of natural and man-made, skilled craft and lucky circumstance that characterize *A Part Together* (2007; also the title of the show), a thicket of branches and irregularly shaped pieces of laminated wood puzzled together with the help of clamps.

Some sculptures evoke particular conditions of landscape and light, none more vividly than *Spring in Winter* (2008), in which two painted pieces of wood, one a luminous gray-blue, the other striped in two muted shades of pink, together suggest (with the help of the title) sunset on a day of midwinter thaw. A little neon-green nest perches

on slender branches above that terminate in tiny bubblegum-colored buds. The less lyrical *Blister Pack* (2008) advances with the lurching force of a wagon train, green glass forms lashed to its branches like a fragile load of optimism.

On the wall were a couple of spare, almost graphic smaller works. In a few quick strokes of wood and paint, *Rearview Mirror* (2008) sketches both the outline of a windshield and, obliquely but effectively, the almost subliminal back-and-forth of checking the mirror and the road ahead. *Aeronautics* (2007), a slender, curving branch painted white and accessorized with little scraps of painted wood, is the medicine-stick of the show, and suggests its dictum: magic is welcome, piety not.

—Nancy Princenthal