

sculpture

ESTHER KLÄS

Review by Jonathan Goodman

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Esther Kläs

Peter Blum Chelsea

German-born sculptor Esther Kläs came to New York for graduate studies at Hunter College, and it looks like she is determined to stay. This is to the city's advantage, for Kläs is an



Above: Esther Kläs, *HA*, 2011, Wood and tape, 3 elements: 71 x 25.5 x .75; 73.5 x 25 x 1; and 74.25 x 27.25 x .75 in. Below: Esther Kläs, *All in*, 2011. Aquaresein, pigments, and wood, 4 elements, dimensions variable.

excellent practitioner of postmodern sculpture, a genre that offers considerable freedom and a respite from the burdens of traditional art. Although Kläs's work clearly engages in a dialogue with Modernism, there is an ad hoc, indeterminate, and informal attitude in her constructions. For instance, *HA* (2011) is held together by tape, while *Trouvé* (2011)

consists of concrete, a coarse material associated more with building than sculpture. Unlike the Minimalists, who usually worked in series, Kläs seems to have a different motive—or at least an individual respect—for each individual piece as a discrete work of art. For example, the two sculptures mentioned above share an aesthetic of fundamental,

rudimentary materials, yet visually they couldn't be more different. Each work appears to have a different reason for being made, a process that emphasizes individuality.

HA consists of three narrow, door-like forms constructed from thin spines of wood; in each component, a tubular, wooden crossbar connects the long verticals of the open construction. The three parts are held together by clearly visible tape. *HA* feels like it couldn't have come about without the presence of Eva Hesse, who used chance as a major part of her technique. As the three pieces of *HA* rest gently against the wall, one notices their height—all three around six feet or a bit more. This makes them more human than they might appear at first glance, pushing the work in a figurative direction despite its initial abstraction. Then, in *Trouvé* ("found" in French), we see a low concrete sculpture that looks very much like a bed; it has some jade-blue color applied to its supposed bottom end, though it is hard to tell whether this floor piece is oriented in any particular fashion. Like *HA*, *Trouvé* plays with an Arte Povera sensibility. The forms are so basic that they seem to exclude the idea of art, but they compel through improvisatory means.

In *All in* (2011), Kläs's atmosphere of indeterminacy feels even more random. The work consists of four pieces—two sentinel-like forms, one dark and the other light, a middle-sized dark brown column, and a very small hut with a white roof supported by four pieces of wood at its corners. This is not about formalism, although one could easily write about the formal aspects of the individual elements. Instead, it is about differing relations of scale and the contrast between darks and lights. Here, Kläs makes direct reference to the figure by including a hand as a support at the bottom of the dark sentinel. One is hard-pressed to make sense of the asymmetrical arrangement of the four components, but they hold together intuitively, challenging us to find the relationship between them while asking that we accept them as they are. One can see the influence of Minimalism, yet there is something new here. Kläs is a genuine and original talent.

—Jonathan Goodman

