

RICHARD DEACON IN ASSOCIATION WITH MATTHEW PERRY

LA LOUVER, LOS ANGELES
1 DECEMBER - 12 JANUARY

Dead Leg, 2007, oak and stainless steel,
240 x 850 x 270 cm. Courtesy LA Louver,
Los Angeles



The new exhibition by noted English sculptor Richard Deacon turns around a single work, the sensual, monumental, rough and fine, oak and steel masculine confection *Dead Leg* (2007). A reclining, capricious four-strand hollow helix, its splayed loopy appendages bend and crack like a whip, cavort and elide like a scale model for the Dalí ride at the California Adventure theme park. It is a casual juggernaut of masterful craftsmanship, laboriously created to be proffered like a balloon animal, to be simply marvelled at and enjoyed. Although certain puzzles of form work against its natural lyricism and warmth, its overall effect is a kind of musicality; a dissonant, trilling baritone cascade of music composed for the eye rather than the ear. But it still makes you want to dance.

The shape begs metaphor, though its visual language is materialist abstraction. From certain angles it resembles a reclining nude, at others it seems to trace the movements of an invisible orchestra conductor's hands. The solid handle is a pirate's leg, a billiard cue, a racetrack. The impulse to approach it, to caress it, to scrutinise its surface and stand under its tallest archways, to bend down to see its underbellies and to start again from every angle, is almost irresistible. The main shape is a hollow square, but the metal brackets not only punctuate and segment the flow of these bundled square strands, they are junctions of change, as the shape alternates between an empty four-cornered corridor and a solid cross, without interrupting its progress through its loop. Like an M.C. Escher drawing

in three dimensions, it's a fantastical object that ought not to be possible. The black tannin leeching through to the wood's surface is organic and uncontrollable. The wood is unprimed, unstained and unpainted, but its variegated surface of spotty black tanning will continue to change over time, and this low-intensity chaos is embraced and encouraged by the artist and his collaborator, Matthew Perry.

The exhibition literature goes to great lengths to credit Perry's involvement, Deacon's longtime partner in all things wood. Deacon is consistently generous with sharing credits, especially when he knows craftsmanship is going to be a hot topic, and Perry seems to be responsible for much of the most sensually compelling aspects of the piece. But in any case, scale, form, concept – all of this came out under Deacon's expert direction. Together they developed technologies for manipulating wood beyond what conventional wisdom says is possible, a practical science-based approach in the service of aesthetic formalism – and that dynamic plays out in the finished product. Materials, especially what the artists refer to as 'disallowed combinations' like wood and steel, and the idea of forcing materials to do what they ought not to be able to do, is in fact much more interesting to them than questions of craftsmanship. They are excited by ideas of rigidity being negotiated, of making flat things round, without losing either the hand of the artist or the identity of the materials in the fight for a finished form. *Shana Nys Dambrot*