

MAD. SQ. ART 2009. MEL KENDRICK *MARKERS*

September 17 to December 31, 2009
Madison Square Park
Presented by the Madison Square Park Conservancy



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FOREWORD.

In discussions of public art, we often talk of conceptual rigor, formal innovation and ingenious use of materials, of site-responsiveness and interactive attributes, of allusions to history and glimpses of the future. As Ingrid Schaffner's essay for this catalogue so eloquently demonstrates, all of these qualities are present in abundance in Mel Kendrick's five *Markers* sculptures that now grace the Oval Lawn of Madison Square Park. But there is one aspect of public art and the artists who create it that perhaps we discuss less often; one that deserves consideration in any conversation about *Markers*. That aspect is courage, and having witnessed every step of the evolution of this project, I believe Mel's courage and conviction merit every bit as much recognition as the qualities of his exquisite work.

It is impossible to overstate the centrality of the relationship of process to product in the oeuvre of Mel Kendrick. His decades of work have resulted in a rich catalogue of sculptures, mostly in wood, that contain the fossil memory of Mel's touch: innumerable hours spent gouging, digging, slicing, stacking and rearranging, taking things apart and putting them back together again. By contrast, cast concrete—an entirely new material for Mel—requires a huge leap of faith. The artist must let go, take his hands off the work, step back and trust that all the time spent preparing for the moment when the concrete is poured will bear fruit in the form of art that is both new and true, recognizable yet riveting in its unfamiliarity, ready to command the centerpiece lawn of one of New York's grandest public spaces. In creating this body of work, Mel had the courage to strike out in a new direction and the conviction to see it through.

Markers was made possible by the board of trustees of the Madison Square Park Conservancy, who have so enthusiastically supported our free gallery without walls, and our esteemed committee of Mad. Sq. Art advisors, especially Martin Friedman, who was such a passionate advocate for Mel's work. Of course, none of this would be possible without the support of our generous patrons, particularly Agnes Gund, Toby Devan Lewis, Ronald A. Pizzuti, The Henry Luce Foundation and our Anonymous donors. We are also extraordinarily grateful to the many admirers of Mel Kendrick who supported the realization of this project, including David Nolan, Jill and Peter Kraus, Gail Monaghan, Francis Williams, Raymond Learsy and Melva Bucksbaum, Ted Poretz and Wynn Kramarsky.

Mel's triumph is a testament not only to his skill as an artist but to his character. We are enormously proud to exhibit his work and to witness the exciting engagement of the public with *Markers*.

Debbie Landau
President
Madison Square Park Conservancy



MODELS WITHOUT REFERENCE: MEL KENDRICK'S SCULPTURE COMMISSION FOR MADISON SQUARE PARK.

by Ingrid Schaffner

Think of a model as an idea—a proposition or puzzle—that exists in physical form in order to give another idea of how something that you can't see might look. Maybe because it has yet to be built (an architectural model); because it's virtually invisible (a chemical model); because it is completely abstract (a mathematical model). And what about supermodels, some park bench wiseacre wants to know? Well, ideal beauties typically out scale the rest of us in height and proportions, whereas the models under consideration here tend to be miniature objects—small enough to get one's head around. Now imagine a model made with no further idea in mind, a model that proposes nothing beyond itself. Do that, and you are in sight of artist Mel Kendrick's new work: five monumental sculptures that transform Madison Square Park into an outdoor tabletop for contemplating models without reference.

Markers, 2009
Cast concrete



Made of cast concrete, each sculpture is a blocky bipartite monolith; the two parts stacked one on top of the other. Cubic and convoluted at once, the blocks are tunneled with holes and shaped by cuts that torque, twist, and release forms from within. The forms are most prominently marked throughout—not to miss the zebra in the room—by bands of black and white concrete. Running horizontal and diagonal, the stripes create a further register of movement. The sculptures appear to rotate, gyroscopically, on ever shifting lines-of-axis. Standing in a row, nearly flush to the ground, on bases of slightly varying heights, the series is titled *Markers*.

Seeing them thus as objects in space begs the question: aren't all sculptures in a sense models? Perhaps, but inasmuch as Kendrick's works neither depict nor abstract an external subject—no figure to identify or essence to cipher—they hone more true to the function a model defines. A tool for contemplation, the model allows us to focus on a premise or a problem. In this case, it's the relationship of the parts, which fit together and form a cube. The two were originally one. Can you see this? Depending where you look in the series, it's most readily apparent in the sculpture that also happens to be the first Kendrick actually made—as if discovering for himself the game of casting one form out of another. The game begins with an almost dumb show of the one-to-one relationship: this horizontally striped positive is stacked on top of that horizontally striped negative. That equation quickly turns more puzzling as the forms get more complex and the stripes start

running in different directions. It gets harder to match up the parts. You know in your head this bulb fits that void, but your eyes can't reconcile the relatively small mass and large emptiness of the two. This twist goes with that turn, but how to pinch one's perceptions around a corner while maintaining a sense of the whole? Elsewhere, it's completely obvious: just turn this part inside out, like a glove, for that part to drop out. (Not that it is in any way clear how to do that with two blocks of concrete.) Even within the scope of one sculpture, supple binary relationships switch to gear-jamming cognitive dissonance.

"I like to dig one thing out of another," Kendrick explained during a visit to his East Village studio this past June, while he was still in the midst of testing techniques. The sculptures are made from giant cubes of Styrofoam. The cubes are then carved and cast in concrete. One problem that instantly emerged had to do with surface—something was getting lost in translation. As a material, foam is inherently luminous—a synthetic iceberg. Concrete patently is not. Maybe it shouldn't have been surprising when the first casting came out looking like nothing more than a block of cement. To fix this failure of material non-transcendence, Kendrick started making his cuts rougher. The resistance of foam to blade is expressed by those lines, which appear like wood grain across the concrete surface, catching light and shadow. Outdoors, in strong sun, the sculptures look as if they had been carved from the wind. The effects of weather will be ever changing and on going, throughout the installation. Rain, for instance, streaks then slicks







the porous stone surface. Seasonal changes from late summer to fall to winter will also alter how the sculptures look relative to the ground and trees. Imagine them in the snow.

After more than a year of preparation in the studio, the actual production took place over a period of four months at David Kucera, Inc., a fabricator of cast and pre-cast concrete in upstate New York. Starting from scratch, Kendrick and his assistant Rob Fisher repeated the entire process they had perfected of hand casting and carving foam. Only now the scale was considerably bigger. “Carving” implies gouging, but “slicing” is really the term to describe Kendrick’s technique of using a hot wire to sculpt with. Pulled taut between artist and assistant, the wire sheers through foam blocks like cheese. And while it’s easy to imagine the straight slices, what about all those curves and vortexes? For these, a spit, or rotisserie, was devised to move the enormous cube around the static wire. Bear in mind, too, that both sides of each cut matter; whatever comes away from the cube constitutes exactly half the work. Need it be said that it would take a sculptor’s imagination to core a cast out of a core for casting? The casting itself takes six days: one day per layer of black or white concrete. At the end of which, the foam is broken away, gouging definitely being the operative term as the original “positive” is destroyed and a concrete “negative” emerges. (In other words, the concrete form that emerges looks identical to the foam one that remains to be cast!) Despite how it sounds on paper the actual process couldn’t be more straightforward. It was this, along with the hands-on nature of the work itself, which attracted Kendrick to work with concrete—as opposed to, say,

bronze—in the first place. Trucked to Manhattan, bottoms first, and installed on footings over two feet of gravel, each sculpture tops off at roughly fourteen thousand pounds.

Aside from being the heaviest work Mel Kendrick has realized to date, *Markers* also poses a more significant development. Kendrick emerged during the 1980s as a leading figure within a generation of sculptors, such as John Newman and Judy Pfaff, who were using formalist modes of construction to address postmodern issues of production and reproduction. He is well known for wooden sculptures that conflate aspects of cubism and surrealism into simulacra of trees as uncanny as they are abstract. With this current work’s lack of any figurative or natural reference, however, Kendrick’s trajectory intersects with the ideas and art that first inspired him. As a student of Minimal and Conceptual art, Kendrick says he was both attracted to the intellectual rigor (he liked seeing decisions being made) and discouraged by the serial reductivism (aluminum boxes didn’t seem to leave much of anyplace for younger sculptors to go). And yet, given the immediacy with which *Markers* expresses a commitment to form, premise, process, materials, and sequence, Kendrick has clearly earned the Minimalist badge of courage, first coined by artist Frank Stella: *What you see is what you see*. From what I can see, Kendrick’s thirty years of studio discipline are precisely what it takes to command such lean baroque sculptures into being. It takes an expert calibration of visual speed and physical proportion to transform the seemingly limited relationship of a working model into limitless works of art. The series is as action-packed as Matisse’s bronze *Backs* in the Museum of Modern Art’s sculpture



(Page 8)
Markers V, in production

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Markers II, installation

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Markers, 2009
Cast concrete

(Previous Page, Left)
Markers III, 2009
Cast concrete

(Previous Page, Right)
Markers V, 2009
(detail)

(Left Page)
Markers IV, 2009

(Left Page, Sidebar,
Top to bottom)
Markers I, 2009
Markers II, 2009
Markers V, 2009

(Right Page)
Markers III, 2009
(detail)



garden, a friend suggests. They are certainly visual dynamos, Kendrick's sculptures. A magnetic charge seems to compel viewers to approach, interact, and most wonderful to watch, pose and have a picture taken. Be sure not to miss the big picture of Kendrick's works framed by Manhattan and flanked by the Empire State and Flatiron buildings, scraping the sky above.

I said there were no references, but that's not entirely true. Those stripes are bound to put many in mind of the facades of the Italian gothic cathedrals of Siena and Orvieto. Architecture in general seems a relevant frame of reference, or better still pre-architecture. Before the field was professionalized and drawing entered the picture, masons cut and stacked architecture directly out of stone. Kendrick himself never makes preparatory works on paper. Likening his blade to a builder's plumb-line, he draws straight through substance. He likewise eschews model-making; if you want to annoy Mel Kendrick ask him if his small sculptures

are maquettes. "I work small so that I can think big," he says. Formative was his experience of a non-Western monument: the Buddhist sculptures carved into the cliffs of Bamyan. (Global treasures, the ancient pair was not long ago destroyed by the Taliban). As a young man, traveling in Afghanistan, exploring the Bamyan caves, Kendrick unexpectedly emerged on top of the tallest standing Buddha's head. Such a journey parallels how one might travel through the voids of Kendrick's sculpture, ending up at apertures and edges that shape a view of everything beyond.

At this point, the notion of the model comes full circle. In his book *The Thinking Hand*, architect Juhani Pallasmaa writes of the "mental transfer" that a mature designer makes between seeing a model and imagining the material reality of the project itself. By holding the object in the mind, he or she can "move about freely in the imagined structure however large and complex it may be." So does Mel Kendrick's sculpture invite us not to merely look but

also inhabit. And without the intermediary of the model, no mental transfer need occur. We can see and catalyze directly for ourselves the decisions, the relationships, the ideas about form and space that each work contains, and which in turn animate the entire sequence of sculptures. And while we imagine inhabiting it, something else occurs. Kendrick's sculptures have entered the mind as completely comprehensible abstraction.

Ingrid Schaffner is the Senior Curator of the Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania.



All photographs
Markers, 2009
Cast concrete

MEL KENDRICK.

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2009** *Markers*, Madison Square Park, New York
2008 *Loopholes*, Dieu Donné, New York
Sculptures, David Floria Gallery, Aspen, CO
Study for a Monument, David Nolan Gallery, New York, NY
2007 *Red Blocks*, David Nolan Gallery, New York
2006 The College of Wooster Art Museum, Wooster, OH
2003 *Drawings in Wood*, Nolan/Eckman Gallery, New York
2002 *Core Samples*, Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH
1999 *Monumental Prints*, Tampa Museum of Arts, Tampa, FL
1997 *Parallel Structures*, Rosenwald-Wolf Gallery, University of the Arts, Philadelphia, PA
1996 Grand Arts, Kansas City, MO
1995 John Weber Gallery, New York
1994 *Sculpture and Drawings*, Gerald Peters Gallery, Dallas, TX
1993 *Sculpture and Drawings*, Grimaldis Gallery, Baltimore, MD
John Weber Gallery, New York
1992 Margo Leavin Gallery, Los Angeles
John Weber Gallery, New York
Black Oil Works: Sculpture and Drawings, Weatherspoon Art Gallery, University of North Carolina, Greensboro
1991 Galerie Carola Mosch, Berlin
1990 Margo Leavin Gallery, Los Angeles
1989 Salama-Caro Gallery, London, England
John Weber Gallery, New York
1988-90 *Essays: Small Wood Works*, The Austin Arts Center, Trinity College, Hartford, CT; traveling: Lehman College Art Gallery, Bronx, NY; Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, MD; High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia; Cleveland Center for Contemporary Art, Cleveland, OH
1988 Margo Leavin Gallery, Los Angeles
1987 St. Louis Art Museum, Forest Park, MO
John Weber Gallery, New York
1986-87 *Recent Sculpture*, University Gallery, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, traveling: Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston; Neuberger Museum, State University of New York, Purchase
1986 Barbara Krakow Gallery, Boston, MA
1985 John Weber Gallery, New York
Margo Leavin Gallery, Los Angeles
1983 John Weber Gallery, New York
Margo Leavin Gallery, Los Angeles
1982 Carol Taylor Art, Dallas
1980 John Weber Gallery, New York

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2006** *Turning Point*, ASU Art Museum, Tempe, AZ
2005 *Paper*, Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery, New York, NY
2004 *Raoul de Keyser, Suzan Frecon, Mel Kendrick, Uwe Kowski, Thomas Nozkowski, Gorney Bravin + Lee*, New York, NY
Drop Out, Photography Show, Julie Saul Gallery, New York
Perspectives@25 - A Quarter Century of New Art in Houston, Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston
2003 Carpenter Center, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA
9th Annual Exhibition, National Academy of Art and Design, New York
2002 *Sitelines*, Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, MA
1996 *Aspects of Abstraction: Albers, Gabo, Judd, Kendrick, McLaughlin, Pollack*, Addison Gallery, Phillips Academy, Andover, MA
1995 *25 Years: An Exhibition of Selected Works*, Margo Leavin Gallery, Los Angeles
1994 *Eight Contemporary Sculptors: Beyond Nature, Wood into Art*, Low Art Museum, University of Miami, FL
Low Tech, organized by the Center for Research in Contemporary Art, The University of Texas, Arlington, TX
Mel Kendrick/Richard Prince, Offshore Gallery, East Hampton, NY
1993 *Drawings*, American Academy of Arts & Letters, New York, NY
1992 *A Passion for Art*, Tony Shafrazi Gallery, New York, NY
Volume 6, Contemporary Sculptors, Guild Hall Museum, New York, NY
1991 *Dead Horses*, Disfigured Love, Lawrence Monk, New York, NY
American Abstraction at the Addison, The Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, MA
Large Scale Sculpture, John Weber Gallery, New York, NY
A Bestiary, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, NY
Art on Paper, Weatherspoon Art Gallery, University of North Carolina, Greensboro, NC
1990 *Editions Ilene Kurtz and Other Prints*, Krygier/Landau Contemporary Art, Santa Monica, CA
Fünf Jahre Zeitgenossische Kunst, Galerie Marie-Louise Wirth, Zurich
Budapest Triennial: Nancy Graves, Mel Kendrick, and Joel Shapiro, Budapest, Hungary
1989 *4 Americans: Aspects of Current Sculpture*, The Brooklyn Museum, New York, NY
American Sculptures: New York-Los Angeles, Kamakura Gallery, Japan
Out of Wood: Recent Sculpture, Whitney Museum of American Art at Philip Morris, New York, NY

- 1988** *BIGlittle Sculpture*, Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown, MA
Lynda Benglis, John Chamberlain, Joel Fisher, Mel Kendrick, Robert Therrien, Magazine, Stockholm
Innovations in Sculpture 1985-1988, Aldrich Museum, Ridgefield, CT
Art of the 80s, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY
24 Cubes, curated by Saul Ostrow, University Gallery, University of Massachusetts at Amherst, MA
1987 *The Allusive Object: Mel Kendrick, Robert Lobe, Judith Shea*, Barbara Krakow Gallery, Boston, MA
American Sculpture: Investigations," Larry Bell, Tony Berlant, Allan Hacklin, Donald Judd, Mel Kendrick, Donald Lipski, Jesus Bautista Moroles, Judy Pfaff, James Surls, Michael Todd, David/McClain Gallery, Houston, TX
Joel Fisher, Robert Lobe, Mel Kendrick, Blum Helman Gallery, New York, NY
1985 *Newman, Dunham, Kendrick, Richter, Artschwager*, curated by Klaus Kertess, International with Monument, New York, NY
Biennial Exhibition, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY
1984 *The International Survey of Painting & Sculpture*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY;
The Tremaine Collection: 20th Century Masters, Wadsworth Antheneum, Hartford, CT
Drawings by Sculptors: Two Decades of Non-Objective Art in the Seagrams Collection, Seagrams Building, New York;
Montreal Museum of Fine Art, Montreal; Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver; The Nickle Art Museum, Calgary
American Sculpture, Margo Leavin Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
1983-85 *Concepts in Construction: 1910-1980*, Tyler Museum of Art, Tyler, TX; Norton Gallery, West Palm Beach, FL; Cincinnati Art Museum, Cincinnati, OH; Long Beach Museum of Art, Long Beach, CA; Neuberger Museum, SUNY Purchase, NY
1983 *New Biomorphism and Automatism*, Hamilton Gallery, New York, NY
Contemporary Sculpture, S.U.N.Y., New Paltz, New York, NY
Groover, Hunt, Kendrick, Blum Helman Gallery, New York, NY
1982 *New Drawing in America*, Sutton Place Guildford, Surrey, England

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

- Addison Gallery of American Art, Andover, MA
Australian National Gallery. Canberra, Australia
The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL
Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY
Centro Cultural Arte Contemporano, Mexico City, Mexico
Daimler Kunst Sammlung, Berlin
Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, TX
Grounds for Sculpture, Hamilton, NJ
High Museum of Art, Atlanta, GA
Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minneapolis, MN
Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
Neuberger Museum, S.U.N.Y, Purchase, NY
New Britain Museum of American Art, New Britain, CT
Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA
Prudential Life Insurance Company, Newark, NJ
St. Louis Art Museum, Saint Louis, MO
Storm King Art Center, Storm King, NY
Tampa Museum of Art, Tampa, FL
The Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, OH
Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN
The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY



PREVIOUS MAD. SQ. ART EXHIBITIONS.

2009	Shannon Plumb <i>The Park</i> Jessica Stockholder <i>Flooded Chambers Maid</i>
2008	Olia Lialina & Dragan Espenschied <i>Online Newspapers: New York Edition</i> Richard Deacon <i>Assembly</i> Tadashi Kawamata <i>Tree Huts</i> Rafael Lozano-Hemmer <i>Pulse Park</i>
2007	Bill Fontana <i>Panoramic Echoes</i> Roxy Paine <i>Conjoined, Defunct, Erratic</i> William Wegman <i>Around the Park</i>
2006	Ursula von Rydingsvard <i>Bowl with Fins, Czara z Babelkami, Damski Czepek, Ted's Desert Reigns</i>
2005	Jene Highstein <i>Eleven Works</i> Sol LeWitt <i>Circle with Towers, Curved Wall with Towers</i>
2004	Mark di Suvero <i>Aesope's Fables, Double Tetrahedron, Beyond</i>
2003	Wim Delvoye <i>Gothic</i>
2002	Dan Graham <i>Bisected Triangle, Interior Curve</i> Mark Dion <i>Urban Wildlife Observation Unit</i> Dalziel + Scullion <i>Voyager</i>
2001	Nawa Rawanchaikul <i>I ♥ Taxi</i> Teresita Fernandez <i>Bamboo Cinema</i> Tobias Rehberger <i>Tsutsumu</i>
2000	Tony Oursler <i>The Influence Machine</i>


From 2000-2003, exhibitions were presented by the Public Art Fund on behalf of the Campaign for the New Madison Square Park.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.

We are grateful to the leadership support for Mad. Sq. Art from the Thornton-Tomasetti Group, Forest City Ratner Companies and Pentagram. Thanks to Manhattan Parks Commissioner William Castro, Katherine Chan, Rob Fisher, Sarah Fritchey, Tom Hemmerick, Jack Kendrick, the staff of David Kucera Inc., David Nolan, Susannah Palmer, Pranna, Punch, Clare Weiss, Paula Scher and Drea Zlanabitnig.

Special thanks to the Board of Trustees of the Madison Square Park Conservancy for their visionary commitment to art in the park.

We gratefully acknowledge the enthusiastic support of New York City Department of Parks & Recreation

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Major Support:
Ronald A. Pizzuti
Toby Devan Lewis
The Henry Luce Foundation

Support for *Markers* is provided by David Nolan Gallery, Jill and Peter Kraus, Gail Monaghan, Francis Williams, Raymond Learsy and Melva Bucksbaum, Ted Poretz and Wynn Kramarsky. This program is supported, in part, with public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, in partership with the City Council.



MAD. SQ. PK. CONSERVANCY

The Madison Square Park Conservancy, dedicated to keeping Madison Square Park a bright, beautiful and lively park, is a public/private partnership with New York City Parks & Recreation. The Conservancy raises the funds that support lush and brilliant horticulture, park maintenance and security. The Conservancy also offers a variety of free cultural programs for park visitors of all ages, including Mad. Sq. Art.



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