

Rebuilding Minimalism

*John Haber
in New York City*

Susana Solano, Jeff Landman, and Martha Clippinger

Minimalism is back, but with a difference. If it ever looked like classy but highly dysfunctional furniture, Susana Solano tempts one to see a lead hammock, while Jeff Landman offers actual seating to chat about the architecture. If it always needed visitors to complete it, Martha Clippinger cuts art down to size to give them room.

They have not discarded repetition and geometry. For Solano, the bilateral symmetry of a bridge will not suffice, not when it could be running four ways. Somehow, they see Modernism as at once a work in progress and a relic of the past. Landman even calls his show "Working on a Building," and his practice extends to archaeology. They do not, however, shy away from associations with the everyday. Now that anything goes, when painters and photographers are working in the space between conceptual art and abstraction, sculpture can, too. Yet it can also locate firmer ground and a place to play.

Minimalist archaeology

When future generations unearth the ruins of western civilization, will they notice contemporary art? Jeff Landman stages his own archaeological dig, spanning millennia. It started with his discovery of the remains of a barn in Pennsylvania. From its timbers, he packs a gallery tightly with constructions in blond wood. They both shape and populate the space, as installation and as human habitation. They tempt one alternately to admire them and to make them one's own.

One notices the change coming off the elevator, where a partition presents an obstacle to movement and to vision, and it is not the last. Within, a white curtain defines a chamber for just a few small beams low to the ground. Could they be all that is left from bedroom furniture or from a room itself? Outside this architecture within the architecture, the room becomes more spacious and familiar. Even opening crowds could move freely among smooth tables,

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freestanding columns, and stiff-back chairs arranged neatly in rows. For once, too, they had a place to sit, and they did not hesitate to take advantage.

Maybe no one dared leave a wine glass on either table, but they did throw backpacks in a corner on the floor. They may not have noticed the regimentation of paired and unpaired chairs, only rarely face to face. The work loses its strangeness as furniture only by becoming Minimalist sculpture. Twentieth-century geometry also helps govern the symmetrical cuts into beams



stacked in pairs in the smaller room by the window, but then so do ancient cultures. Landman cites as influences Mesopotamian and early Christian architecture, along with the Viennese school. Others might think, too, of Neolithic monuments in his native England, along perhaps with Dan Graham, Isamu Noguchi, and Ursula Von Rydingsvard.

Maybe future archaeologists will have other things on their mind, as at the end of *Planet of the Apes*. In Chelsea alone, they might care more about the wine bar on the High Line. In turn, artists have

fabricated their share of cultural debris, like Liz Glynn with a heavy hand, in papier-mâché clothing, "antiquities," and an anchor. Liz Magic Laser, too, has played with the politics of art openings as social events, and Andrea Zittel has staged her Post-Minimalist fallout shelters. They all see contemporary culture as inherently recycled, and they are not always sure whether to celebrate it or destroy it. From that point of view, Landman could be settling for cleaning it up.

He does seek "the construction of a lightness, a special cleanliness," along with a corresponding weight, and the results *can* look a little too clean. Merely to move so freely among cultures and millennia washes away differences. Landman thinks of uncovering not just civilizations, but a transcendent experience. If that stack by the window could better serve as a funeral pyre or for human sacrifice, he is not saying. Still he has room for loose ends. A single timber stands at an unsteady angle, still rough, as another layer of time—and a long table has a single chair, like a conference for one.

Landman derives a heightened awareness and even comedy from the conflict of cultures. He also works on a human scale—and not just with home furnishings almost ready for Ikea. The beams beg to be described as the length of a forearm and the width of an outstretched hand. The pyre is just about waist high. More and more artists are working between Minimalism and the present, as well as between art and architecture. From the smooth outlines of his sculpture, Landman finds a less cynical deconstructive architecture, with space for visitors.