



By Deborah Wilk

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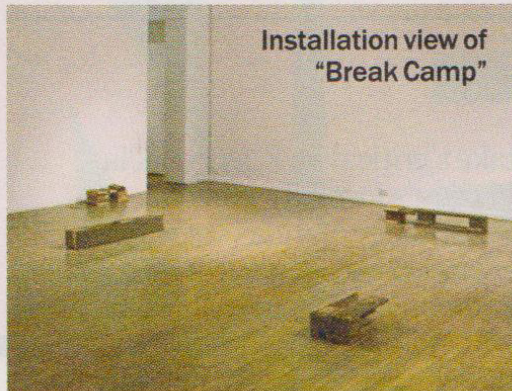
Helen Mirra: *Break Camp*

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Helen Mirra



Peter Freeman Gallery, through Jan 20 (see Soho)



Art

"Break Camp," the latest New York exhibition from Chicago-based artist Helen Mirra, evinces a lyricism appropriate for an artist often tagged as "poetic." Sculptures constructed of eroded shipping pallets (a material the artist has used to great Post-Minimalist effect in the past) and accented with pinecones are methodically arranged around the gallery. Uneven cuts in the wood, created by a manual saw, are

evidence of the artist's hand. It's a meditative show full of rough-hewn beauty that invites lingering. Off the main room is a smaller one, housing one more pallet construction and three wall pieces featuring typewritten texts that the artist copied from a book on deer hunting, a clear reference to human trespasses on the natural world. "Break Camp" continues Mirra's long-held interest in environmental issues and the personal dilemmas they can pose. But rather than keeping viewers at bay, as some of her earlier, opaquely esoteric installations have done, these new works offer a comparatively accessible reading: An elegant allusion to the life cycle of trees, from creation (pinecones) to destruction (lumber) that also has broader geopolitical implications. The rigor of Mirra's practice, which once seemed obfuscated by a reverence for critical theory, emerges here in a heartfelt search for balance that feels very sincere.—*Deborah Wilk*