

ARTFORUM

By Lori Waxman

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Helen Mirra: *Hewn Third*



In “Hewn Third,” Helen Mirra gathers together three individual works which speak among themselves in tones of blue, green, and brown. Long, finger’s-width strips of watercolor-dyed cotton run in a delicately broken horizon along three of the gallery’s walls. Poetically incidental words typed haltingly across them constitute the only actual text in the show, but the other works also highlight Mirra’s preoccupation with language. Hung horizontally as well, but in clustered fragments, are wooden planks colored with milk paint (an eighteenth-century furniture finisher), their imperfections gently highlighted with putty. These sculptural paintings, hand-sawn from reclaimed shipping pallets to the length of Mirra’s arm plus the width of her hand, are part of a larger work, *65 Instants*, 2003, that in its original configuration at the Berkeley Art Museum was displayed as a continuous band over one hundred feet long. Each painting has its own one- or two-word title; their grouped arrangements here act as linguistic generators, giving rise to strange, subtle texts that you have to look for between the lines, as it were. Across the room, a small sculpture Mirra knit from dark, undyed wool muffles the corner where a shelf meets an exterior wall. The quiet cacophony in the gallery bespeaks equally the poetry of single words and raw materials.