

Pick Up Sticks: Reuven Israel's Post-Structuralist Play Dates

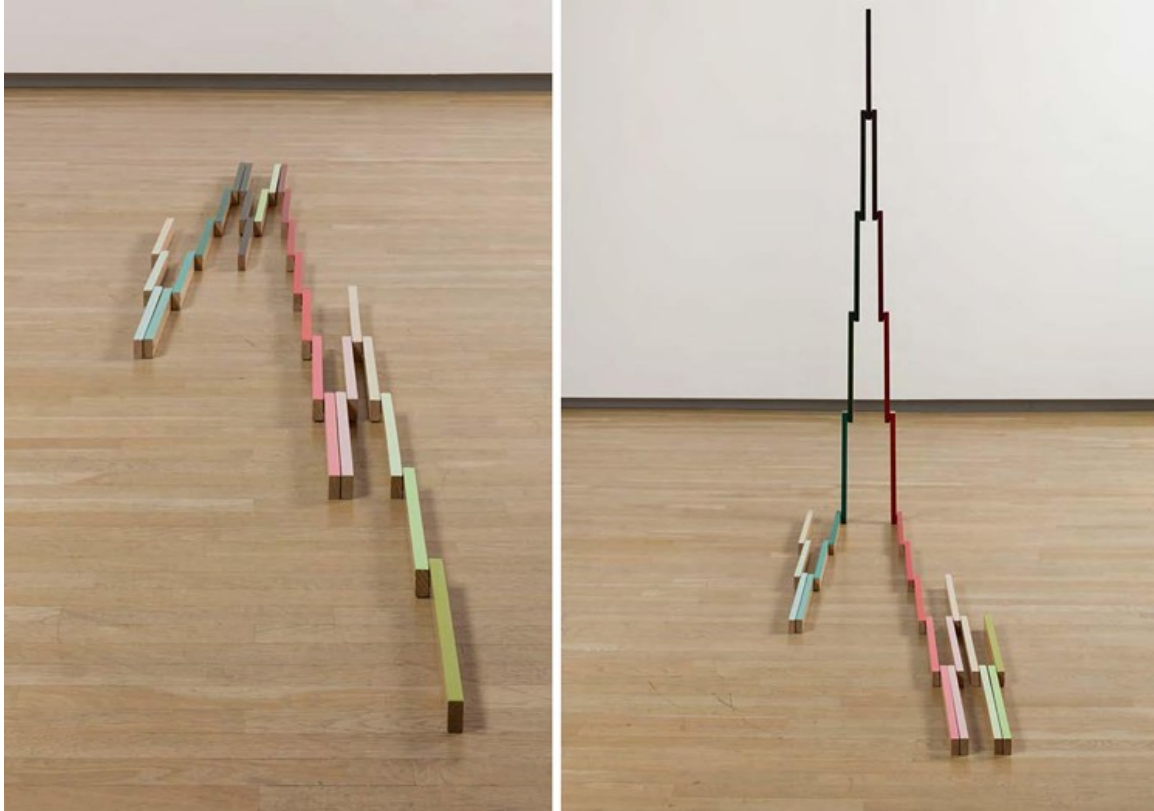
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Reuven Israel, *Untitled Folding Object 36A* (2018), oak, paint and brass hardware, 15½ inches wide, height and depth variable
Courtesy Shulamit Nazarian

Part Jenga, part Transformers, and pretty funny in a post-structuralist art theory kind of way, Reuven Israel's new exhibition of modular sculptures for wall and floor at Shulamit Nazarian presents itself, as the title indicates, in segments. *In Four Acts* is composed of singular works that arrive flat but soon rearrange themselves into a potentially infinite series of expanding and contracting sculptural configurations.

The objects are constructed from brass-hinged pieces of wood, which cluster and crouch like closed scissor gates, portable shelters or game boards. Applied color on certain sides of certain wood pieces creates moments of change and subtle surprise as one moves around each work. But the viewer doesn't have to create all the change of perspective — these sculptures are intended to do that for themselves.



Reuven Israel, *Untitled Folding Object 27A* (2018), oak, paint and brass hardware, height and depth variable
Courtesy Shulamit Nazarian

Israel essentially is attempting to create a set of paradoxes — one in which changeability is represented in fixed forms, and permanence of compositional choices is less important than the idea of encompassing the potential for change within a finished work of art. Not unlike people, then, each form carries within itself the power to become several other versions of that self — in this case, shifting from flat patterns to wide-open nets, tall like turrets, wide like walls, perforated like fences, sprawling like angular foundations.

Both architectural and organic, with a wit that, while dry, is leagues more playful than the majority of minimalist sculptures in the world, these works are prepared to do more than tell — they show. “The four different expressions of the exhibition are separate acts,” according to the exhibition materials. “Moments in time captured from a longer performance in which the sculptures become the actors and the gallery’s architecture becomes the stage.”



Reuven Israel, *In Four Acts*, installation view
 Courtesy Shulamit Nazarian

Aside from becoming incrementally more elaborate with each act, and the illusions and surprises of each one's color story becoming more manifest, the movements of the ones creates an entirely new installation landscape across the gallery, as the overlapping sightlines and other visual and physical intersections unfold (pardon the pun) into a fresh choreography. The scale of these works is keyed to the human body, so that not only due to the look of an old-school toy but also because of the scale, mimicking or modifying their movements is easy to imagine.

In carefully planned behind-the-scenes setups, the dozen or so sculptures of various sizes and color schemes will, every two weeks, shift their shapes (not placements) to a new position. In this way, what started in Act 1 when the show opened on Nov. 3, changed to Act 2 on about Nov. 20, and will change to Act 3 on or about Dec. 4, before its final placements for the last week of the show, which closes Dec. 20.



Reuven Israel, *Untitled Folding Object 55A* (2018), oak, paint and brass hardware, 23½ inches wide, height and depth variable
 Courtesy Shulamit Nazarian