



Left: Jacqueline Kiyomi Gordon, installation view of “No Touch,” with *Untitled (Fantasy II)*, 2012; foam, felt, cotton, wood, ultrasonic speakers, mp3, and speaker stands, dimensions variable. Below: Jacqueline Kiyomi Gordon, *Searching for Vespers (LD 1–4)*, 2012. Glass, steel, plaster, cement, wool, wood, carpeting, and speakers, dimensions variable.

## SAN FRANCISCO

### Jacqueline Kiyomi Gordon Eli Ridgway Gallery

Though Jacqueline Kiyomi Gordon’s exhibition “No Touch” explored the interrelationship of space and sound, it was the translation of sound into visually beautiful, “fine art” objects that acted as the siren’s call, luring us in for a closer look and listen. Stepping off the hustle and bustle of Minna Street, viewers entered the quiet of the lobby, which has become an important transition space in which gallery owner Eli Ridgway orchestrates a program of rotating installations. The narrow hallway, with its dark reverberant flooring leads to a storefront, aluminum frame door, which, for Gordon’s show, opened to reveal her first installation, *Untitled (Fantasy II)*.

At the center stood an object with all the telltale signs of an abstract sculpture—angular lines, larger-than-human size, simple, non-decorative forms—but rendered in the stuff of a

suburban corporate interior: acoustic foam, felt, and wood. Two speakers, pointed toward opposite sides of the object, played an array of popular music, though no one was listening. The directed-sound technology projected a focused beam of sound akin to the beam of a flashlight in which light tunnels directly ahead rather than illuminating an entire space. In this case, the sculpture’s sound-absorbing materials deadened the soundtrack, which was pointed directly at it. The only way to hear the music piece was to plant oneself directly between a speaker and the central form. Two abstract wall works created from melamine foam acoustic panels completed the elements in this space. Though “colored” in the non-color of a construction product that typically slips anonymously into ceilings, these large-scale “tiles” took on a presence of their own.

A series of steps led down into the space below for Gordon’s second installation, *Searching for Vespers*

(*LD 1–4*). Here, she playfully inverted the relative positions of object and speaker. Four speakers pointed outward from the center of the space, facing four objects of differing acoustic properties: glass, steel, plaster, and cement. Gordon amplified their differences by taking recordings made within each of the four objects and directing the sounds back to their original materials. In so doing, the high-pitched sounds of glass and steel became higher, the muffled sound of concrete lower. The “viewer” literally heard an auditory representation of the visual object.

*Wall Panels VII*, a series of sculptural acoustic panels, was installed across the length of the lower gallery. Here, a subtle “rose-blush” palette distanced the pieces from the everyday. The acoustic properties of the “reliefs” created a unique zone of quiet that expanded the territory of the installation.

Gordon’s final installation occupied the project room, the innermost

space in the gallery. For *Untitled (There nor Here)*, a lowered ceiling busy with exposed plumbing was painted white to become part of the space. Shapes particularly suited to sound absorption surrounded the room, creating a chamber with reduced reverberation. Not dissimilar to the modulated walls of a recording studio, the work trapped sound within an eerily quiet space.

Like John Cage’s infamous orchestral piece *4’33”*, Gordon’s installations beckoned one to listen closely to the physical properties of space. After leaving the show, while hearing my footsteps echo through the entry, my memory was jerked back to a Gothic cathedral in England where I had marveled at the reverberations created by massive stone pillars and soaring ceilings. Sound is inextricably connected to space, an insight that Gordon captures aurally and visually.

—Donna Schumacher

## SAN FRANCISCO

### David Middlebrook The McLoughlin Gallery

Wood, stone, and metal may have been supplanted by newer materials (e.g., chocolate, tofu, and frozen blood), but some artists enjoy both the technical and aesthetic challenges of traditional, “noble” materials. David Middlebrook, who emerged on the Bay Area gallery scene only relatively recently—with a 2010 retrospective at the Triton Museum in Santa Clara and now this solo show—has had a long career making public sculpture and



teaching (at San Jose State University), so he's well versed in both technique and theory. The 18 sculptures featured in "Think Things," generally cairn-like stacks of objects (or fragments of objects) rendered in permanent and often unlikely materials, confirm his self-assessment as "a thingmaker who thinks." Technical expertise and virtuosic craftsmanship please (and fool) the eye; art history, political commentary, and absurdist humor please (and fool) the brain.

Middlebrook's socio-political Surrealism renders palatable a number of unappetizing issues that humanity chooses to push around the agenda plates. *Collision Course* is a gravity-defying aggregation, fabricated in bronze, marble, and aluminum, composed of apparently enlarged polished stones and eggs threaded together to form an inverted question mark or hook. The title refers to human usurpation of avian flyways ("We poison them, we blast them with horns, we electrify them") and, more broadly, to environmental apocalypse. *The Price of Beauty*, a wall-hung sculpture in carved pine and bronze, takes the form of a large wooden comb; one of its tines sprouts branches or roots, resembling Daphne's fingers in Bernini's mythological sculpture—a stunning symbol for the 1.5 percent of old-growth forest left after the quest "for adornment and beauty, i.e., furniture, paneling and other decor." 99% features a golden egg, perforated like a tea infuser and perched atop the rim of a bowl-shaped fragment of eggshell, neatly conjoining the world's Humpty-Dumpty economy with the insulated minority that caused the crash. In the Magrittean

**Above:** David Middlebrook, *King of Things*, 2010. Indian gibble, cast epoxy, aluminum, and bronze, 77 x 29 x 26 in. **Right:** David Middlebrook, *99%*, 2012. Clay-infused resin and gold-plated bronze, 21 x 22 x 22 in.



*Congress*, with its briarwood tobacco pipes, kissing, bowl to bowl, in the sinuous shape of rising smoke, Middlebrook indicts "the stagnant houses of Congress sucking each other's smoke without introducing fresh ideas or air." *King of Things* and *Queen of Time*, though made as separate pieces, form a regal couple



in the Adam/Eve tradition or its Modernist variants (like Max Ernst's heroic/ironic bronze group, *Capricorn*). For Middlebrook, the casual variety of the source pieces, including shreds of truck tire that he found in Los Angeles, rendered in bronze symbolizes democratic inclusiveness: "We are leaders—a people of common sense and backgrounds made up of ordinary parts."

Fittingly, Middlebrook includes a couple of homages to Marcel Duchamp. *Breath of Fresh Air* is a handmade replica of Duchamp's *Fountain*, a urinal purchased from a plumbing supply company. Middlebrook's clay-infused resin receptacle, constructed to scale from photographs, rises from the ground on bandy, sinuous legs that simulate the straps used by movers, resulting in an odd puppet—part bucket-toting broomstick from *Fantasia* and part H.G. Wells Martian war machine. The title derives from the urinal's resemblance to respirator masks, as well as Duchamp's renowned abhorrence of "olfactory" oil paint. *Chalk Talk*, an enlarged bird skull sits atop a four-legged lab or bench stool, reminiscent of Duchamp's impossible unicycle,

*Bicycle Wheel*. But where the Dadaist played with paradox, Middlebrook evokes the wider world: the title refers to basketball pre-game strategy; the avian skull and stool, made of Jurassic-formed slate, refer to oil dependency and species extinctions, the causes and effects, respectively, of global warming.

—DeWitt Cheng

## LINCOLN, MASSACHUSETTS

### Gary Webb deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum

Slick, colorful, playful, and without a cohesive aesthetic, Gary Webb's work has yet to settle on a recognizable style—he's having too much fun. A carnival atmosphere pervaded his recent show, "Gary Webb: Mr. Jeans," with nursery-school hues and shapes bending, arching, and trying to fly off in all directions. Just when we thought we had a handle on Webb's style, we encountered *Goolie Goolie Split*, a mosaic wall of mirrors almost 30 feet long that brought to mind a similar work at Logan Airport, or *Dorset Knob*, a large-scale panel of brick carved into an enigmatic bas-relief representing a pair of arches, the hint of a face with unruly hair, and a cluster of complicated small forms.

Webb constructs most of his work from molded or cast aluminum painted in primary colors to look like plastic, generally combined with consumer-friendly materials like stainless steel, glass, chrome, mirrors, brass, and resins. These various elements are bolted, beveled, and mortared together with crisp craftsmanship. Many of his sleek pieces beg to be touched.

Webb likes to work big. Two outdoor pieces measured eight and 18 feet tall. Several dozen outsized thermos bottles—not all perfectly cylindrical, most of them subtly deformed—are stacked to form *Jungle Headache*. In contrast, only four huge bottle shapes—pink,