

ARTFORUM

Christopher Kurtz
TOMLINSON KONG CONTEMPORARY
270 Bowery
June 22–September 15

Christopher Kurtz approaches sculpture with the meticulous dexterity of a trained craftsman. To create *Litany*, 2012, arguably the centerpiece of his first solo exhibition in New York, the artist routinely woke before daybreak to hand-carve maple, oak, and cedar into strips of wood, then gingerly pieced these together into a continuous beam that curves thirteen feet across the gallery and soars five feet toward the ceiling. In some places thick and heavy, in others nimbly slender, it swoops through the air, often branching into seamless, curling tendrils.



Litany is so delicate and so immaculate that it seems unbelievable the work was carved by hand. Kurtz has painted the sides of the beam a stark white and the top and bottom a coal black, which obscures the medium somewhat, causing the work to oscillate between what it is (wood, handcrafted) and what it seems (metal, machine-made). This dualism accentuates the capacity of wood to do things it often doesn't do—twirl and spiral, pirouette and twist. It also highlights Kurtz's process, notably the stunning levels of patience and attention required to make wood appear weightless.

What is significant about *Litany*, then—as opposed to some of the other works on view here, all impressive displays of technical prowess and execution—is the way Kurtz emphasizes the human quality of craftsmanship as a genre. Is it pitifully romantic to think the human hand may imbue an aesthetic object with a certain set of qualities that a machine cannot? Perhaps. What is certain, however, is that it is precisely the illusory choice of paint as well as the play of dimension that unravels these questions, pushing *Litany* firmly out of the realm of craft.

— Allese Thomson

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