

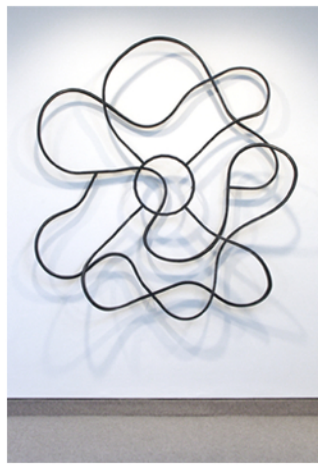
Michael Beatty at Boston's Barbara Krakow Gallery

Sculpture Featured on Newbury Street

By Shawn Hill



Steel and laminated wood with milk paint



Welded steel and beech with milk paint



Graphite, gouache and watercolor on paper



Birch plywood with milk paint and wax

Perimeter
 Michael Beatty
 Barbara Krakow Gallery
 10 Newbury St., Boston
 May 24—July 1, 2008-05-25
<http://www.barbarakrakowgallery.com>

Dualities define Michael Beatty's sculptural output. Or maybe they're polarities. His drawings juxtapose two elements, one hard and geometric, the other soft and flowing. His sculptures mix two materials: wood and metal, in a dialogue that often feels like opposition. His all-wood sculptures take a different tack, focusing not on tension but on symmetry, emphasizing intriguing, mysterious organic silhouettes. Here the doubling is within one element, multiplied as in a mirror image, or a kaleidoscope.

The steel elements that unite and anchor Beatty's flowing, curvaceous and linear strips of wood read like shackles, or at least clasps that need to be so dense and strong to tame that wild bent wood and hold it in place. The metal is dark, polished, and unbreakable, with a cold, vault-like sheen.

But it's also nimble and multifaceted in its own way. In "Even Keel," the dark metal performs a stair-like movement, bending at right angles in a sturdy progression along the wall (all of these works are wall reliefs), while the loop of white wood bounces and flounces along, a dancer's arabesque just flying down those "stairs." In "Full Circle," a loose, doubled interpretation of the figure eight (or maybe it's a Mobius Strip, as the four lobes seem to have no ending or beginning points) is held in place at the center by an H-shaped piece of steel. But that's only seen on end: up close, the cross-bar is actually a circle. Or, more accurately, a dodecagon, a 12-sided regular polygon. This intense, small little form seems like a battery charged with all the strength needed to keep the infinite loop of wood turning.

In "Here and There," we move up an order to a 24-gon, a large quasi-circular shape that seems to be the center of a flower of twisting black loops. The loops occupy a vaguely circular shape some 70" across, but the central steel polygon is the only actually symmetrical part of the piece. The loops of wood swing over and around each other, meeting at t-junctions at oblique angles, one darting wildly through the central element before arcing below and around to end ... well, not to really end at all, as the loops keep using those custom joints to spring in new directions.

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