

## Andrew Hayes @ Seager Gray

Posted on 14 September 2015.



Diagonal Study Triptych, 2015, steel, altered book, 15 x 8 x 3.5" each

Some of the most eccentric, most beguiling sculpture I've seen in the past few years comes from a 33-year-old North Carolina artist named Andrew Hayes. Fusing metallurgy and bookbinding, Hayes uses slabs of steel to compress book pages into odd shapes that, with a few exceptions, skirt real-world referents. Their absence drives us to engage with the ingenious details of his fabrication process: the topographically contoured pages whose outer edges often resemble water-carved rock; the barely visible surface seams where sections of curved metal conjoin to form gentle slopes; and the accordion-like sandwiching of paper into compartments of various shapes and sizes. Hayes coaxes paper into behaving as if it were almost liquid, bending it to assume the shape of whatever cavity he seeks to fill. And it's this upending of expectations about what paper can or cannot do that animates this precisely crafted, austere, magisterially beautiful work.

The same can be said of a lot of altered book art these days. It's a subcategory dominated by Exacto-blade wizards who treat books as excavation sites, spanning both craft and Conceptualism. What sets Hayes apart is that he makes no attempt to engage with the content of the books he mines for raw material. His goal, it seems, is devising provocative, improbable shapes that deliver more than the eye can discern from any single vantage point. At numerous junctures throughout the show, I found myself shouldering up to the wall to take in alternate views. What I learned is that there are few flat surfaces; these objects, which measure about 19 inches at the longest dimension, are made up mostly of mildly torqued volumes and curving edges, which is not something you can readily sense from across a room. Those observations, in turn, led me to realize that Hayes' work aligns a lot more closely to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century modernist sculpture and architecture than to book art, however elastic that category may be.

Among sculptors, I thought immediately of Tony DeLap whose curved, “hyperbolic edges” also require circumnavigation to be apprehended. You can also catch in Hayes, strong hints of mid-century artists like Anton Pevsner, Tony Smith, Anthony Caro and Fletcher Benton – artists who, like Hayes, are (or were) formalists to the core. Architects Zaha Hadid, Frank Gehry and Oscar Niemeyer might also find in Hayes a kindred spirit, Niemeyer especially given the gawky, protuberant, space-age buildings he designed for Brasilia. I also sense strong links to the photo-based collages Jay DeFeo made in the 1970s, which through iterations of drawing, photocopying and manipulation, became entirely abstract.

Still, for all the evasions of meaning effected by Hayes' contortions of unidentified texts, I sense a certain linguistic component, evident in pieces

shown in series to encourage “reading.” That we can't break the “code” to say what, exactly, they mean only adds to their power and allure. Like ancient tablets scratched out by tribes whose languages and alphabets have become extinct, Hayes, with paper and steel, has created a fresh visual language, one deeply rooted in the past, but also utterly unique.

*Andrew Hayes, “Passages” @ [Seager Gray](#) through October 4, 2015.*



Sufflate, 2015, steel, altered book, 13 x 9 x 9"

–DAVID M. ROTH