

Art in America

March 1993

Jeffrey Brosk at Stephen Rosenberg

A sense of deliberation pervades the work of Jeffrey Brosk. It is particularly apparent in his wood-and-slate reliefs because their being mounted on the wall encourages one to study them as pictorial compositions rather than to respond to a sculpture sense of space or material. That's not to say that these works aren't concerned with material. They are, thoroughly: not only does Brosk capitalize on color and surface differences between wood and slate, but he also plays naturally irregular, tree-shaped slices of wood against the orderliness of machined lumber. But placement on the wall gives these works a visual rather than a physical emphasis. That, somewhat surprisingly, makes them more interesting than the few small freestanding sculptures in the show—pieces related in substance and form to the wall works, but whose minimalistic clarity is too close to inertia.

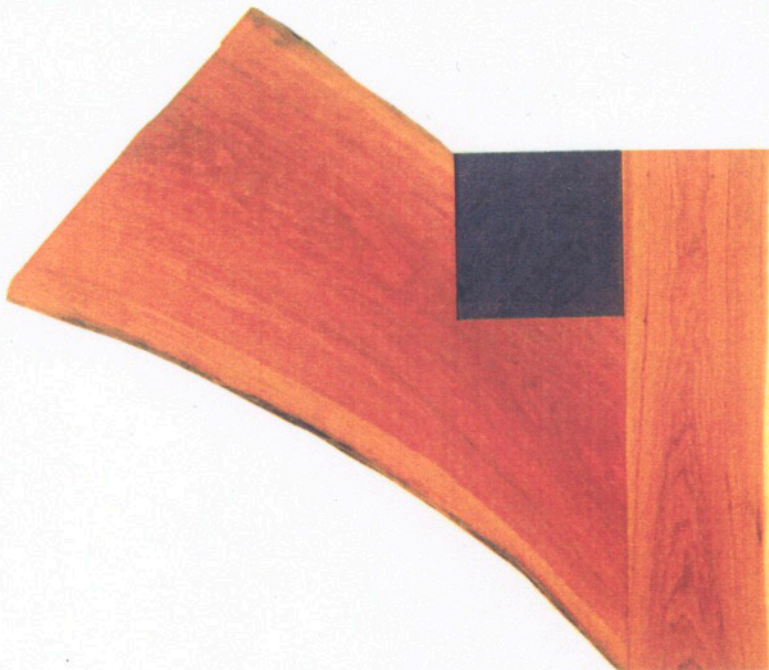
Inertia is certainly not a problem in *Sanger*, a wall piece (53 by 47 by 3 inches) consisting of a vertical plank on the right, a larger and less regular slab sweeping leftward like an outthrown arm, and a square of slate inset into this ragged piece so that it exactly lines up with the top edge of the plank. This composition is almost Japanese in its subtlety and focus; everything is so measured, so balanced, that one seems to breathe at a slower pace in response to its calm. But it does not become boring, precisely because of the contribution of the materials (another rather Japanese effect). Here the grain of the wood, so like broad,

racing brushstrokes, supplies an internal movement that enhances the occult balance of the piece as a whole (the vertical plank and the slate square are much smaller than the irregular slab, yet they succeed in visually anchoring it).

Rush Creek, a wall piece that spans 16 1/2 feet, is the largest work in the show. Here a promised movement supplies the drama: the piece consists of two long, shallow curves of wood (cut from a bent tree trunk) set end-to-end, with a vertical bar of slate between them. The configuration, which Brosk used in an earlier, smaller work that was seen in his last Rosenberg show, evokes a wooden-handled knife being pulled out of a wooden sheath. The whole is symmetrical and weighty, yet the slice of slate, by suggesting the first glimpse of an emerging blade, gives it a graceful dynamism.

Most of the works shown had titles taken from locations in the western U.S., probably because last year Brosk worked on a private commission in Texas for a large, open outdoor structure that interwove elements of wood and stone with views of wildflowers, brush and the wide horizon. Yet the pieces seem independent of their titles; any elicitation of place pales beside Brosk's clearer communication of distinct materials working in concert with human skills of hand. The measurement and fitting of parts, and the interruption of one material by the insertion of another, set the man-made against the natural. And the man-made triumphs as the signs of the artist's attention become the predominant features of the work.

—Janet Koplos



Sanger, 1992, wood, slate, 53 by 47 by 3 inches; at Stephen Rosenberg.