

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Prince, Mark, "Miroslaw Balka," *Flash Art*, July-September 2011

MIROSLAW BALKA NORDENHAKE - BERLIN



At a time when much contemporary art consists of packages of references that open like a zip file on a computer to efficiently impart their messages, Miroslaw Balka's work is a salutary statement of inarticulacy. He assembles found objects burnished with age and usage and marked by the grubby hands through which they have passed. The aura of silence he imparts to his sculptures modulates the ability of the past to speak through them. They are like valves he selectively opens to reveal lost voices.

The titles of the four works in this show consist of their measurements, suggesting a Minimalist agenda. *268x142x54,84x40x22* (2008) recalls Robert Morris's early portal sculptures, and yet Balka is also intimating a basic narrative. The first element, three planks forming a step, is set at a contemplative distance from the main structure, a vertical plank topped by a narrow shelf on which an empty glass is balanced. There are unsettling resonances beneath the formal composure. The glass is symbolically "walking the plank," like a condemned man, and that overhanging ledge suggests the lip of a gallows. The sinister punctum of the piece is the step, suggesting an act of dispassionate

spectating.

Balka's modifications animate his materials spatially and temporally. *120x80x15/DB* (2008) is an industrial wooden palette threaded with a string of fairy lights. They flash through the slats. Light punctuates time and seems to speed it up, as though the aged object were ageing further, and exponentially, before our eyes. Three of the four tea trays making up *130x32x17, 46x32x2* (2009) have been screwed together, end to end, and fastened to the wall, the third one angled outwards towards one on the floor. It suggests a hop, skip and jump to land on level ground. This formal connection is partly there to distract us from the musty uniqueness of the trays themselves. They become modules, sculptural building blocks, first of all, and only secondarily relics Balka collected from the Polish Ministry of Culture in the aftermath of the collapse of communism. He renders the blatancy of history bearable, making our relation to it a little less presumptuous.

Mark Prince

MIROSLAW BALKA, *130 x 32 x 17, 46 x 32 x 2*, 2009. Steel, plastic.
Courtesy the artist and Nordenhake Berlin/Stockholm.