

# ArtReview

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## TOM BURR

Tom Burr: *Deep Wood Drive*  
Bortolami Gallery, New York  
7 March - 26 April

**Tom Burr has been lumped** into group exhibitions with detritus-wielding artists like Isa Genzken and Rachel Harrison. He's no junk-piler, though. Burr may be avowedly postminimalist, slapping cheap, found ephemera onto pristine formal surfaces, but he's not so *post-* as to let his gestalts come entirely undone. Simple, clean shapes, such as hinged planks resembling furniture, become schizophrenic surfaces for advertisements and campy paeans to gay, *bon vivant* tastemakers such as Truman Capote and curator Chick Austin. For *Addict-Love*, Burr's landmark 2008 solo exhibition at New York's

SculptureCenter, the latter was resurrected, tableaulike, by a vintage turntable and record inserts splayed across the floor, combined with a vintage Chanel dress draped over an assemblage of wood balustrades, some with their balusters missing, painted a neutral gallery-white

Burr's work is the stuff of Michel Foucault's dreams. An object lesson for the latter's 'What Is an Author?' (1969), Burr scrambles his own authorship, locating it precisely where it is not: other people and places, European Modernism and literary scions, high design, fashion and food. A construct of historical precedents and references, his identity is front and centre even when it's barely there at all.

This has never been more evident than in his exhibition *Deep Wood Drive*, which is titled after a street on which Burr lived as a child. It's perhaps his most autobiographical exhibition to date, though one that obfuscates his personal history with a tactful, sculptural abstraction that's strangely disembodied.

In the two-dimensional works, blankets and clothing are evacuated of almost all their bodily associations when fixed to pictorial space. Burr's 'cloud paintings' are attached with bulletlike tacks to plywood panels, while in *His Personal Effects (Blue Sweatshirt)* (all works 2012), the artist's own well-worn Helmut Lang sweatshirt is flattened into the shape of a painting, though a dangling sleeve brings it all back to Burr's body, if only briefly.

The installation *Baited Like Beasts (A Moon Viewing Platform)* also evokes the corporeal. A proposed moon-viewing platform Burr planned with his childhood neighbour Mrs Pip is here turned into a large black cage with three-foot openings between the bars. Hanging from the ceiling, a tastefully generic globe lamp hovers next to a tipped-over chair. Here Burr turns theatricality back into theatre itself. Implying a narrative, the chair seems literally to have just been tipped. Proplike, it invites further toying. *An Orange Echo* does the same: two rows of theatre seating face each other within a low plywood wall. A passageway is cut between them, and in theory one could simply take a seat. In practice, though, this would never fly: not only is a do-not-touch policy implicit, but the high value of Burr's work guarantees its policing.

Following in the tradition of institutional critique, *Deep Wood Drive* highlights both how arbitrary are the distinctions between authors and identities, objects and artworks, and yet how strictly these frameworks are enforced by specific institutions and spaces. After all, Burr's quasi set-pieces do one thing in a gallery, but drag them just a few feet south onto West 20th Street and they do something else entirely.

DAVID EVERITT HOWE