

By Increments: The Opening of Gerhard Marx's Cumulus

REVIEWS

GOODMAN GALLERY CAPE, CAPE TOWN, 22 JANUARY - 12 FEBRUARY 2011

Cumulus, Gerhard Marx's first exhibition at the Goodman Gallery, is an intricately composed affair. In it Marx, who is known for his signature style of using scraps of maps to construct layered drawings, introduces some newer works alongside his more recognizable pieces.

Walking into the exhibition gave me the strange feeling that I was revisiting old daydreams from my checkered career as Grade 9 Geography and Biology student. The room was lined with prints of topographic trees (Marx used pages from old South African atlases to fashion flat images of rambling weeds) and sprawled skeletons made out of dried plants twisted into paper, as well as my personal favorite, a group of ominous clouds constructed entirely from black rulers. Perhaps it's no coincidence, then, that *Cumulus* is a lesson in a sort of deceptive sense of control. Marx's works are neatly precipitous, carefully and delicately kept, but still feel menacingly sprawling. "Most of my works," he explain, "are incremental accumulations of small things... I am interested in forms that border on formlessness – unstable, shifting, growing, permeable forms."

The first piece I saw as I came in was a ribcage made meticulously out of twigs. Despite being hollow, you can sense the spectre of lung in between the small, dry sticks: it almost feels forested with capillaries. When talking about his use of objects and materials, Marx explains that each "denies its own physicality or presence by pointing at something else, in the manner in which a map incessantly points at the territory, or in which remains imply a lost whole."

While I was looking around, I bumped into the artist's partner being enthusiastically ushered though the space, one imagines for the umpteenth time, by their young daughter. When I asked if I could take a picture of the two of them in front of one of the drawings, the little girl began to pose in a wild series of angles, as if trying to compliment (or reinterpret?) the piece. Seeing Marx's 18 month old thrash delightedly in front of his works sort of summed them all up nicely for me: they're small, unusually articulate tempests, precisely and quite beautifully contained.

Cumulus will be at the [Goodman Gallery](#) from 22 January to 12 February.

Staff writer

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