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Lucy Skaer: 'Sticks & Stones'
and 'Random House'
Murray Guy
By Roberta Smith



Lucy Skaer's "Sticks & Stones" installation at the Murray Guy gallery, one of two current shows of her work in Manhattan

In two shows, the excellent British artist Lucy Skaer covers much ground in several mediums with uneven results. The repurposing and recycling of objects, images and forms — from other art, her own work, her life — are prominent in Ms. Skaer's work, as with many artists today. The strategy yields outstanding results in the five related sculptures at Murray Guy. The tone is set by a low-lying sculpture: two thick, rough-edged slices of mahogany inlaid with smaller objects found around her studio — a tiny prototype, parts of other sculptures, a small lithography stone and an oblong blue ceramic tile. The piece, which evokes sculptures by Carl Andre and Bruce Nauman, is itself a prototype for the next four: an all-ceramic version; one in marble with touches of malachite; another in aluminum with gunmetal; and, finally, an all-wood version (including veneer). Together they form a stunning meditation on processes, materials and craft, on mutating details and textural contrasts, on looking, achieving an almost cosmic scope. I doubt each would seem quite so rich on its own.

The show at Peter Freeman Inc. is larger, but also more scattered and arbitrary. Three sculptures make uninspired use of the worn sandstone steps from the home of Ms. Skaer's father. A handsome and immense multimedia print combines images of a Vuillard painting with those of the wallpaper book covers favored by Leonard and Virginia Woolf's Hogarth Press. The 530 small ceramic lozenges, laid out like model tanks, are based on the squat shape of cut emeralds. There are other works here, all of some interest and even brilliance, especially once explained. But noticeably they lack the inherent complexity and insistent allure of the pieces at Murray Guy.