

FrameWork 12/13

Liza Eurich on Didier Courbot



Notes

Description. Each of the five sculptures in Didier Courbot's *Table works* series, presented at Susan Hobbs Gallery this fall, consist of only two components. A seemingly simplistic premise. The first is an intricately crafted geometrically shaped brass base. The material of the second portion varies, but it could be characterized as a single plane or ground. In this installation: foam core, paper, book cloth, ribbon and then foam core again.

The Provisional Parts. The two components are not fixed together, but rather rely on positioning and similar form. The secondary material, or top portion, is balanced precariously on its brass counterpart – notably the rigidity of these material choices differs. While in each instance the foam core exists only as a single uniform shape, the paper, book cloth, and ribbon pieces bend at points of contact with their base. For example the book cloth in *Table works (14)* flexes over a brass bar that acts as a fulcrum, directing the ends of the cloth towards each other, though they remain sprung apart.

The paper component of *Table works (13)* hangs from its brass stand and extends beyond the length of it, so that it gathers at the base. The tension from the paper reaching past this point causes it to bend or curve, buckling outwards like two outstretched arms. Even more pliable than this is the ribbon in *Table works (4)*, draped vertically, it abides the pull of gravity most, and its ends rest more flatly.

The tentative materiality of these grounds illustrates their provisional qualities most readily. A balancing act, subtle shifts in their positioning can occur as a result of movement in the space around them. In line with this, their malleability makes ensuring bends and curves behave consistently each time the work is installed challenging. For these reasons, *Table works* extends the boundaries of what might be considered sculptural, so that it is not defined by a singular notion of permanence or stasis.



From left to right: *Table works* (9), *Table works* (13), *Table works* (14), *Table works* (4), *Table works* (17)

Making Things for Other Things, Sometimes Incidentally. Each of the delicate brass components in Courbot's *Table works* convey a sense of refinement and craftsmanship. Such careful construction is suggestive of a planned design, inferring that each of these parts was intended to fit a previously existing complement – their width, length, height, and shape a configuration of it, set to mimic or accentuate.

The complements: foam core, paper, book cloth and ribbon are defined by a different economy, their construction appears to be more happenstance and their materiality vernacular. Peering closely at these pieces yields evidence that portions have been carefully excised. For example, a single confident pencil line remains, having delineated a path for a pair of scissors in *Table works* (13). There is a slight extension of equally spaced incisions on a portion of the foam core in *Table works* (17), showing where the removal of several uniform rectangular pieces occurred. Both the preliminary drawing and careful plotting in these implies that the removed portions are not arbitrary, but were done with the intention of using them to construct something else. Subsequently, we can contend that the counterparts featured so prominently here were at one time discards, leftovers from the construction of other projects.

The assured marks and excisions of a task, later act as a means of highlighting material qualities – an incidental aesthetic, torn frayed edges, indented foam core, drooping paper and odd shapes. These now become generative. In doing so, this approach brings two seemingly disparate material registers and methods of production into proximity.

Meeting. See: FrameWork 3/13:3 Didier Courbot on Simple Present Future Anterior.

A Kind of Drawing, A Type of Sculpture. These works demarcate space without mass. In many ways their immediacy, informality, and provisional characteristics align them with a language of drawing. On the level of surface alone: there are the pencil lines of *Table works (13)*, the cut marks of *Table works (17)* and *(9)*, the contours of thread in *Table works (4)*, as well as the creases and band of blue in *Table works (14)*.

Once each flat plane is joined with its brass counterpart it becomes object-like. This is most pronounced in the works that allow these flat planes to contort around their brass armature, producing pockets of negative space. As the viewer encounters and moves around them their dimensionality falters, they become seemingly flat for a moment until these pockets become visible again, giving form and separation to shapes. The bifurcation of these flat planes has other effects: in *Table works (13)* it produces shadows that emulate subtly painted tonal gradations from white to off-white or cream; in *Table works (4)*, the doubling creates a denser blue in areas that overlap, a result of the ribbons slight transparency.

Title. The title alone suggests an identifiable scale, one that is intimate and handheld, an object that seems at home on a tabletop. It also conjures up a sense of space, both familiar and domestic. These illusions to a particular scale and a particular space imply a sense of casual utility, something that we might hold or use in the comfort of our own home – a bowl, a glass, or a utensil. Contrary to this though, the delicate appearance and precarious nature of these sculptures does not invite grasping. Instead this idea of casual utility does not relate to the sculptural objects as a whole, but rather to one of the components. In each pairing, the brass portion enacts this, a table or a stand, customized to hold their balancing counterparts.

Of the five included, *Table works (17)* suggest there are at least twelve others.