

## Review: David McDonald at Jail Gallery

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-- Holly Myers



Given the great confusion of purpose that often seems to be afflicting contemporary art — where anything goes, for better or worse — one has ever more reason to appreciate an artist such as David McDonald, whose work remains solidly rooted in a few profound fundamentals: color, texture, scale and the mysterious alchemy of material and form.

It's not work that advertises itself or goes out of its way to get your attention. Of the roughly two dozen sculptures in his show at the [Jail Gallery](#), most are about the size of a fire hydrant and all sit directly on the floor. The materials are humble — wood, cement, mortar and paint, primarily — and the shapes basic.

The cube has been a prominent McDonald motif in recent years. It appears here in "NON," a piece consisting of stacked gray and yellow box-like forms, and the particularly lovely "Nove Alberi," a free-standing wall, about the size of a car door, made from slender wood

blocks of fluctuating colors.

In the show's remaining works, McDonald shifts into an exploration of the cylinder: cast-cement forms of various heights and diameters, all vertical, loosely clustered in one corner of the gallery. If this all sounds rather dry on paper — like an exercise in geometry, or just so much recycled Minimalism — what largely keeps it from being so is the extraordinarily resonant nature of the arrangements and surfaces.

For all its structure and the heft of its materials, the work has an organic tone and an improvisational, even spontaneous spirit. The cement is studded with pebbles, air bubbles and pockmarks. The pigments — mostly grays and blacks, with touches of turquoise and ocher — are loosely, even (it seems) haphazardly applied. They drip and splatter; in places they seem worn or peeled away. Each slip inscribes an element of character.

Though McDonald is clearly indebted to Western Minimalism, his more striking affinity is with ancient architecture and the more rustic strains of Japanese pottery. The title of the show is "Minor Monuments," which encapsulates both the humility and the dignity of these absorbing objects.