

ART

## Matt Johnson Defies Gravity at Blum & Poe

Gallery 

WORDS

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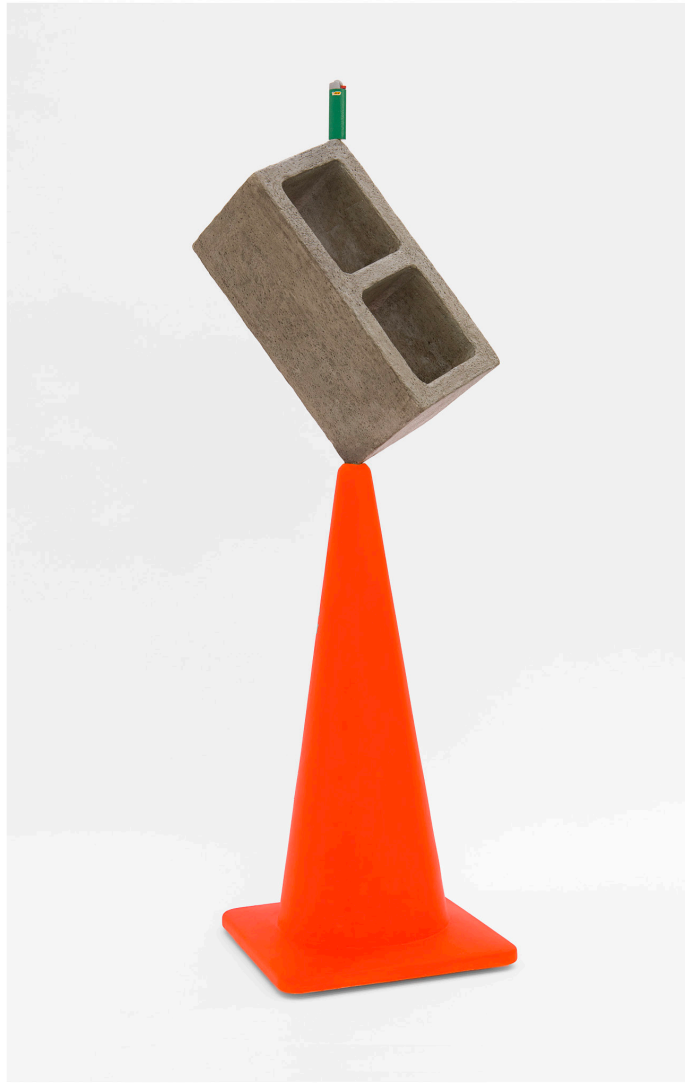
Installation shot featuring 7 block and 36 brick horse and 11 brick reclining figure with 1 bar and a Matisse book. Both works polychromed wood, 2019. Image courtesy Blum & Poe.

I'm glad that maximalist, junk art has phased out of style. Sculptures awash with kindred detritus often felt ironic to the point of being anti-art (not that irony can't be a useful tool, but at a certain point it becomes a defense mechanism). In Matt Johnson's solo show at Blum & Poe's Culver City headquarters, the junk is anti-junk, and the ethos, though at times laugh-out-loud funny, is earnest through and through.



"1 block with 2 bricks and 2 bricks cantilevered on 1 bar," 2019, polychromed wood. Image courtesy Blum & Poe.

The show is comprised of 11 sculptures all made exclusively from wood, and each is a fantastically successful trompe l'oeil feat wherein the primary motifs are construction materials, most often hyper realistic bricks and cinderblocks. This trick allows the faux-bricks to dance in gravity-defying ways—some appear as if they were set in motion à la Fischli and Weiss's *The Way Things Go* (1987) before being frozen mid-action, while others simply form incredibly delightful, implausible compositions.



"Traffic cone with a clock and a lighter," 2019, polychromed wood. Image courtesy Blum & Poe.

Some titles offer only a list of the rendered objects, such as *2 blocks, 3 bricks and 2 bars*, *Traffic cone with a block and a lighter*, or *5 brick tower on 1 block and a light bulb*, (all works 2019), the latter depicting a suite of bricks all seemingly balanced on a single lightbulb. The keen humor combined with immaculate craft—all coupled with the quotidian shittyness of the objects being rendered—recalls Tony Matelli and his sojourns into bronze fruit and weeds.

Other titles hint at what the combined objects allude to, like *11 brick reclining figure with 1 bar and a Matisse book*, wherein wooden bricks and rebar rest atop a Matisse catalogue (also made from wood), the whole composition folding into a Henry Moore-esque reclined figure when seen from the right angle. The masterful *7 block and 36 brick horse* achieves a similar effort, as bricks and blocks cascade in the most unlikely of forms which, from a certain angle, also references an equestrian sculpture. Finally there are the quasi-figurative works, such as *6 block standing figure with a cigarette*, wherein six cinderblocks stand up, the "legs" at precarious angles, to form a figure. A cigarette hangs from its mouth, as if the blocks have briefly clocked out from their role as objects.