

Jonathan Brand by Jo Briggs

For Jonathan's exhibit, *Untitled*, he presents three objects: a small photograph of himself as a boy, aged six, standing next to his BMX bike; a large wooden machine on trestles, resembling a work bench (Jonathan explained to me that this is a 3D pantograph); and finally an accurate copy of a BMX bike, carved from MDF, lying on its side on the gallery floor. A clue is left so that the significance of these objects can be deduced - a BMX bike wheel is still locked in place in the 3D pantograph. To make the replica bike an actual BMX bike was disassembled and the pieces individually traced using the pantograph machine. The pointer was lowered inched by inch until it touched the original, at the same time bringing the drill bit down onto a roughly pre-shaped MDF block. Once one side of the piece was formed, the block was then flipped 180 degrees so that the process could be repeated completing the three-dimensional copy; the resulting parts were then assembled.

Talk to Jonathan and he will go into great detail about how he counter-weighted the machine so that while he was working the parts doing the carving became weightless and easier to maneuver, and how he was working blind, only looking down at the original part he was tracing and not the MDF copy, or tell of the occasional mishaps in the weeks long process that reminded him he was working with heavy machinery. However, the focused, methodical, almost scientific, process by which Jonathan went about creating the machine and the MDF bike does not explain the uncanny power and unique aesthetic of the finished piece.

While obviously carved, the MDF copy is precise, even down to the tread on the tires. Since it is traced from the original, it is an indexical copy with the same feel as a death-mask or a daguerreotype. It's more like the double of the original object than the word copy would suggest. It seems to capture something of the original's aura. In fact, the more that I looked at Jonathan's exhibit the stranger the three objects and the relationship between them seemed to become. It was as if they were conversing with one another or members of a family group with invisible ties between them. The parent (pantograph), the child (MDF copy), and the animating spirit and inspiration which sparked the whole process - the photograph fixed to the gallery wall. Seen together they form a chain that spirals through time, each element engendering the next. Or they could be seen as coming full circle, from indexical photograph to indexical copy. In striving to regain the bike of his childhood, reassembling his MDF copy in what he calls 'an act of fetishized devotion', Jonathan seems to have created something which is both less and also more than the original.