



Liam Gillick, "The Wood Way," 2002.
Installation view.

LONDON

LIAM GILLICK

WHITECHAPEL ART
GALLERY

"The Wood Way" brought together a selection of twenty-eight works from two ongoing series produced over the past six years—the "What If? Scenarios" and the "Discussion Islands." The exhibition title is a literal translation of the German word *Holzweg*, which denotes a pathway cut by loggers. Read metaphorically, it aptly indicates the prospect of losing one's way among the meanders and thickets of an oeuvre that is both diverse and diversionary, for while Gillick's practice to date has encompassed a wide range of media and activities (including sculpture, writing, architectural and graphic design, film, and music) as well as various critical and curatorial projects, his work as a whole is also marked by a

fondness for diversions and distractions, tangents and evasions.

The physical core of the show was an imposing group of Gillick's signature-style sculptures, made of brightly colored Plexiglas sheets affixed to anodized aluminum frames and arranged in lateral or vertical gridded screens. These works, despite their considerable physical allure, are designed to be beside the point; that is, they are intended as spurs to discursive rather than phenomenological interaction. The challenge thus posed by the decision to site so many of them within the Whitechapel's cavernous ground floor gallery was how to prevent this concatenation of ostensible backdrops for speculative activity from becoming a mere display of sculptural objects.

The ingenious solution was to slot the majority of these individual works into a complex armature of raw pine planks that simultaneously drew them together and kept them apart. This double movement of incorporation and differentiation is in keeping with a general tendency in Gillick's work to accommodate both sweeping generalizations and fine detail. The show's complex sculptural core was complemented by a variety of physically peripheral works, including a number of prominently displayed wall texts, a framed photograph, and such interventions as a redesigned gallery entrance door and a collaborative makeover of the upstairs café. Gillick's strategic shuttling between discursiveness and materiality, between freewheeling ideological critique and applied industrial design, has some notable precedents and parallels. His art has roots in the formal and conceptual maneuvers of the generation of Dan Graham and Daniel Buren, and it has blossomed alongside that of like-minded contemporaries and occasional collaborators such as Rirkrit Tiravanija, Philippe Parreno, Douglas Gordon, and Jorge Pardo. More generally, Gillick's persistent cultivation of a paradoxically nonassertive rhetoricism has certain affinities with Gianni Vattimo's notion of emancipatory "weak thought" (*pensiero debole*). Gillick is attracted to nebulous "middle grounds": spaces of possibility as well as compromise where the urgent "here and now" of classic modernism becomes the more circumspect "space between the near future and the recent past." As Lawrence Weiner implies, in a characteristically succinct and oblique contribution to the exhibition catalogue, Gillick's work readdresses the vexed relationships between inherent form and inherent

meaning, between mise-en-scène and sociopolitical realities, while resolutely resisting any firm conclusions.

—Caoimhín Mac Giolla Léith