

Charles Ray at Regen Projects II, Leah Ollman

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Charles Ray's latest sculpture arrives 10 years after his last major statement, *Unpainted Sculpture*--the stunning fiberglass replication of a wrecked car painted uniformly in flat, industrial gray. Like the earlier work, *Hinoki* recreates the husk of something that has been forced out of commission, this time a huge fallen tree that Ray discovered on California's central coast. He methodically sectioned the 32-foot trunk, made silicone molds of the parts and cast them in fiberglass. These served as models for master woodcarvers in Osaka, who replicated the original, decayed tree in freshly cut Japanese cypress (*hinoki*).

The main body of the sculpture rested just off the ground on wooden blocks in the center of the gallery's hangarlike space. A smaller, forking offshoot lay directly on the floor. Like a young actor playing the role of someone far more weathered and experienced, the warm-toned, pinkish cypress assumed the texture of its aged, gnarled, cracked, hollowed, worm-trailed prototype. The work of the hand mimicked the erosive work of time, but the illusion was not carried through to its technical conclusion. Chisel marks and notched seams were plainly visible in the finished sculpture.

Hinoki reads as both majestic contrivance and meditative homage, artificial relic and immense death mask. It has an awe-inducing presence akin to that of the fallen giant that served as its inspiration, but Ray's work, born of cerebral as much as physical processes, lasts longer as idea than experience. It manifests--and to great extent reconciles--a wealth of contradictions. Being both referential and literal, extravagant in effort but spare in gesture, natural yet synthetic, the work is in equal measures a conceptual exercise and a manual performance.

Hinoki represents the residue of an event, but one of an entirely different order from the 1997 car crash that gave rise to *Unpainted Sculpture*. In contrast to the car accident's immediacy, violence and sudden drama, the tree's demise was a prolonged affair, discernible only over time, driven by natural (including invisible) forces. Like much of Ray's art, the 1997 sculpture had a savvy, Pop sensibility, while the new piece verges on the worshipful. There might be some irony to be squeezed from the self-referentiality of carving a tree from wood, but little of Ray's characteristically wry humor is in evidence. What most distinguishes *Hinoki* from his prior work is not the conceptual scaffolding that supports it, but rather its aura of genuine reverence.