

# ArtDiversions

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## Repetition: the Art of Observing

BY AMY ON 27 JANUARY 2015 IN CHICAGO

*Megan Euker, a Chicago-based artist, creates a sculptural exhibition that focuses on one man, Richard.*



Partial Exhibition Shot.

“My fascination with letting images repeat and repeat . . . manifests my belief that we spend much of our lives seeing without observing,” Andy Warhol once said. These fitting words are evident in a sculptural exhibition based entirely on one man, Richard, in *The Richard Project: Beginning to End*, currently on show at Linda Warren Projects. Megan Euker, a Chicago-based artist, blends traditional techniques with contemporary technologies to create an exhibition that culminates her two year study of a single subject.

Sculptures of the human figure have been crafted for thousands of years. Sometimes figurative sculptures are seen in isolation; Michelangelo's *David* (1501–1504) is one example. Or a sculpture can depict a group of individuals, as with some war memorials. But it is uncommon to see a sculptural exhibition made entirely of the same subject. Although Richard strikes the same casual pose, each piece in the exhibition is different. The artworks' titles hint at this: *Bust of Richard (Ply)*; *Richard Front (Small Ply)*; *Richard Back (Small Ply)*. As the renditions of Richard change throughout the exhibition—sculptural pieces of his front side, backside, full body, bust or hollowed out versions—so do viewers' relationship with him. Repetition of a subject calls for an acute eye to capture the minute details that generate a subjective narrative.

One of the pieces visitors cannot miss is *Big Richard (Poplar)*. Devoid of facial features, beautiful shades of horizontal grains of wood fill Richard's frontside. His body language from the backside, however, is telling: complete with hands in pockets, baggy pants, wrinkled shirt and a slouched posture. This anti-heroic stance is a quality that piqued Ms. Euker's interest. With information deliberately withheld, visitors visually jump to pieces around the gallery to gather additional details. *Bust of Richard (Ply)*, for instance, denotes Richard's facial features and hairstyle. Viewers collect just enough information to propel their story forward.

Ms. Euker's sculptural depictions of Richard are made with 3D scans and predominantly CNC Milling. Given the technology used, she initially aimed for "precision and correctness," her artist statement explains. But Ms. Euker came to accept "technical glitches." And they work to her benefit. Viewers can see the mode of experimentation she refers to. Take *One Third Richard*. Only the middle portion of Richard remains, as he rests horizontally on what is now a flattened left side. And *Richard Front (Small Ply)* is missing part of his leg and arm. "One of my favorite parts of the process was testing the limitations of what I can do, [and] finding the possibilities and limitations of the machine," Ms. Euker adds.

Despite the technology used, her craftsmanship must also be acknowledged. The handicraft of cut wood is laudable: the visceral qualities of each piece are enticing. "I tend to go towards processes that are extremely labor intensive," she offers when asked about her technique. Gluing, clamping, cutting and sanding are just part of the process. Viewers get close: visually sensing the delicate woodcuts with their eyes, imagining the texture of Richard's wrinkled shirt and thinking about the painstaking process to delineate his rolled shirt sleeves, the waves in his hair or his smooth facial features from wood. Indeed, the tactile sensations and sensorial engagements radiating from Ms. Euker's process are ubiquitous.



Megan Euker, *One Third Richard*, 2014.

Who is this man, Richard, anyway? He is a colleague of Ms. Euker's, as the gallery explains, but we do not know much more. And deliberately so. "You don't always need to tell everything," she says. "Sometimes it is good to let the viewer think a little . . . to play with missing information." The repetition of Richard in various forms helps viewers derive their own answer to this looming question. That is, viewers are tacitly asked to look closely and analyze carefully: making up a narrative along the way.

In a world filled with an over-abundance of images, thanks to smartphones and social media, this exhibition is a timely one. Although we see a lot each day, what are we really perceiving? Repetition is how we learn in art and life, as Ms. Euker demonstrates. "I am using repetition of subject matter as a way to extinguish anxiety and fear about a process." Ms. Euker mastered an art-making technique by doing something again and again. And viewers benefit from her process: learning not only to see an exhibition of the same subject, but also to observe the fine details.



Megan Euker, *Richard Front (Small Ply)*, 2014. "The Richard Project: Beginning to End" is on show at Linda Warren Projects, until February 14, 2015.