

Art in America

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André Cadere

Ortuzar Projects, New York

SINCE HIS DEATH IN 1978, AT AGE 44, Warsaw-born, Romanian-French artist André Cadere has become something of a cult figure, especially in Europe. He is best known for his idiosyncratic sidewalk performances – *présentations* or *promenades*, as he called them, which he began in 1972. These ostensibly simple solo actions involved walking through the art hubs of New York City, London, and Paris while grasping a tall staff. The sculptural objects, which he called *barres de bois rond*, were constructed from numerous stacked cylinders of painted wood, imperfectly shaped but uniform in size, connected through the center via wooden dowels and glue (the colors were determined by an eccentric numerical

system of the artist's invention). A superlative example is the six-foot-tall *Round bar of wood B 01234000* (1975), with fifty-two segments in an alternating sequence of yellow, orange, red, and white. It leaned against the wall in quiet repose alongside numerous other examples, and thirty color photos that Cadere took to document the performances, in the artist's recent exhibition at Ortuzar Projects in New York – his first survey in the United States since a PS 1 retrospective in 1989.

Cadere's promenades were inspired in part by Richard Long's "walks in landscapes," such as *A Line Made by Walking* (1967), in which the British artist walked back and forth in a straight line across a meadow until he created a path of flattened turf. Cadere was also motivated by the early absurdist performances of Gilbert & George, who became personal friends and supporters. In his promenades, Cadere would lean the pole against the exteriors of buildings, or against the interior walls of art galleries. In New York, in the late 1970s, he typically chose prominent contemporary art venues like Leo Castelli to surreptitiously exhibit his work within the context of another artist's show.

Although Cadere had a gentle, nonthreatening demeanor, passersby and gallerygoers often regarded his interventions with consternation, and on more than one occasion, gallery staff or security ejected him and his barre. On some level, Cadere's endeavor was ironic and contradictory. The destinations of his promenades were often galleries or museums that he had previously approached with an offer to sell or exhibit his barres as sculptures. He was, of course, routinely dismissed as one of many young artists without significant institutional recognition. For that reason, his undertaking is regarded today as a radical critique of the gallery system of the time, with its exclusivity and emphasis on art-world buzz.

Absent the artist and the work's performative aspect, the barres appeared rather talismanic, less vehicles of critique than static objects to be regarded. Presented here as discrete sculptures, they bore the influence of Brancusi's *Endless Column* (1918) as much as the calculated Minimalist aesthetics of Donald Judd and Sol LeWitt.

Among the surprises in the exhibition were related early pieces, such as the tall *Cubic bar of wood* (1971), a prototype of the barres, in which the wood segments are cubes rather than cylinders, and the colors and sequence

of the segments appear more complex and varied. Rarely, if ever, shown in the US, six large, untitled abstract paintings from the late 1960s explore biomorphic shapes and quasi-Cubist spatial structures. One approximately three-foot-wide painting from 1967 features countless modulated facets of green, blue, and yellow that emanate in radiating bands from two points of white near the top of the canvas. The colors shift and alternate in irregular patterns that correspond to those of the barres. Another work, from 1969, a painted wood diptych with jagged edges, was displayed on the floor, merging abstract painting with Minimalist sculpture à la Carl Andre. It is a daring piece that served as a bridge between the playful color and spatial relationships in the paintings and the austere elegance of the lonesome barres.

– David Ebony



André Cadere: *Round bar of wood B 01234000*, 1975, painted wood, 72½ inches tall; at Ortuzar Projects.