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ARTFORUM

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Lucy Skaer
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By Frank Expósito



View of "Lucy Skaer: Sticks & Stones," 2015.

"Under the shade I shall flourish," reads the national motto of Belize. The Central American country is mostly covered in forest, and in the 1750s it was the site of the first export of logged mahogany to Europe from the New World. In Lucy Skaer's second exhibition at this gallery, "Sticks & Stones," which is concurrently on view with Skaer's other show at Peter Freeman, Inc. titled "Random House," the artist uncovers the shadowed history of Belizean mahogany, a product that was later abandoned because of fluctuating market demand until the mid-twentieth century, by subverting its material uniqueness.

Ten flitches lie consecutively on the gallery's blond wooden floors. The two primary rectangular cross sections made from a mahogany tree are located at the entrance. These slabs are successively replicated in detail in four different materials, including stacked ceramic tile, matte-gray marble, reflective aluminum, and hollow veneered wood. The forms of the originals remain the same. Inset within each slab are geometric or figural objects that have also been replicated and transubstantiated, such as coins or handheld sculptures made of tiger's eye. In their context, these inhabitants act like stand-ins for compartmentalized environments, including rooms, monetary systems, or bodies. Wedged between these fixed variations, they perform more like bridges or joints.

Together, these materials appear to develop in the same way the history of media that have built cities over the last few centuries has unfolded: the thatched roofs of Mesopotamia, the fired walls of Babylon, the marble colonnades of Greece, the glistening metals of Abu Dhabi, and the facsimile of data on the information superhighway. It may only take a stick or a stone to topple even the grandest of empires; the next one might be right on the horizon, even if the overwhelming shade of the present blocks out its light.