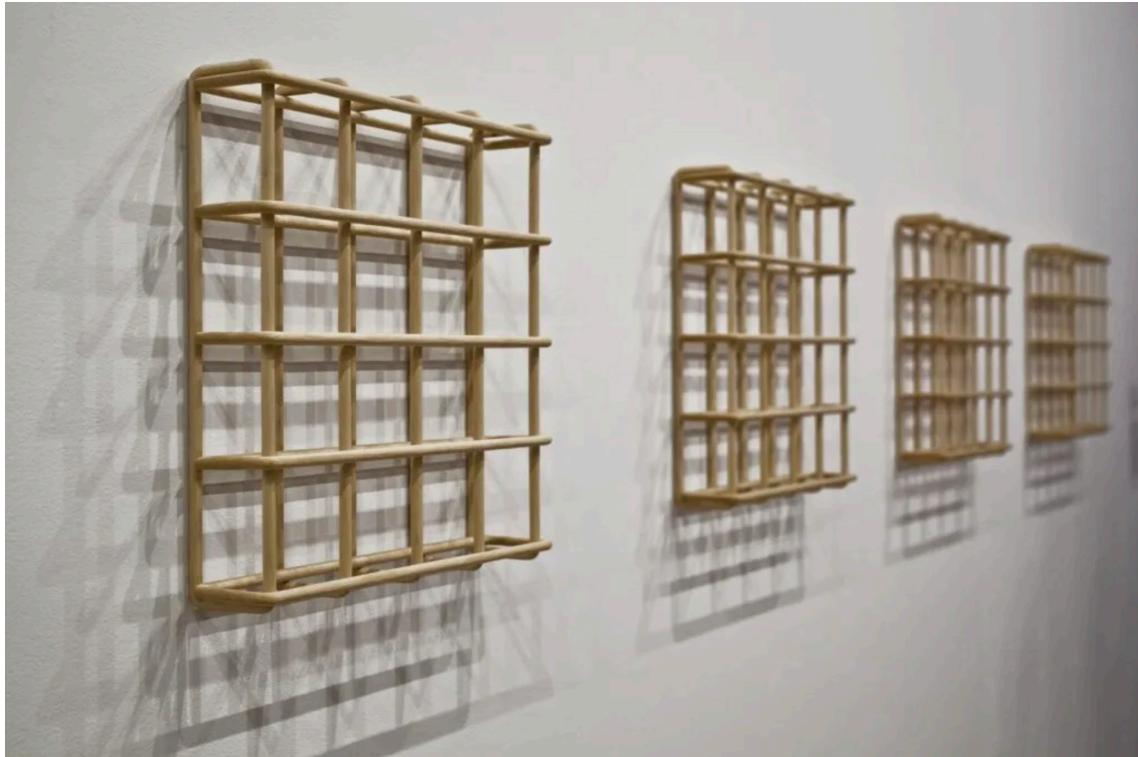


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At the Whitney, Matt Browning Whittles Up a More Honest Modernism

THE DAILY PIC: Browning's hand-carved sculpture give us Modernism with a human face.



THE DAILY PIC (#1758—Whitney Biennial edition): At first, Matt Browning's suite of identical sculptures in the Biennial look like fairly trivial—even “zombie”—abstraction. That impression fades when the wall label lets you in on their backstory: Each of Browning's little wooden “cages,” with all of its quite separate and unattached elements, was carved from one single block of wood, the way virtuoso whittlers take pride in carving chains from solid lumber.

Browning takes pleasure in just the kind of crafty hand-skills that rigorous modernism—not to mention the Industrial Revolution—were supposed to have weaned us from, while using those skills to make gridded objects with all the visual rigor of one of the anti-craft pieces of Sol Lewitt, Donald Judd or John McCracken. Browning also gets at the fact that, as the conceptual craftsman Josiah McElheny pointed out in a famous essay, the industrial esthetic of Judd and his peers was in fact achieved through artisanal techniques. Despite the fate of America's working class, human hands have yet to be rendered totally redundant in the modern world. *(Photo by Lucy Hogg)*