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# Roula Partheniou

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## TORONTO



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**Roula Partheniou: Parts and Wholes (installation view, 2013):** Images courtesy MKG 127, Toronto.

**By Jennifer Matotek**

What qualities or properties of a thing are those that help us to recognize a

**Roula Partheniou**

thing as the thing it is? The sculptural constellations of Roula Partheniou's exhibition *Parts and Wholes* seem to provide complex responses to this multivalent question.

**MKG 127**

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A collection of objects arranged on a pegboard – some genuine, some replicas – provides a point of entry into the exhibition. Formally, the pegboard resembles Wertheimer's dot lattice matrices, which were designed to demonstrate his principles of perceptual organization. It may be a clever nod to early thinking about Gestalt object recognition, the more complex principles of which seem to dominate the thought processes and looking demanded of the viewer to perceive the sculptures in the next room.

At first glance, one sees commonplace objects hanging from the gallery walls and sitting on two low tables, situated in the space as ready-mades. But, it quickly becomes evident that these items are, in fact, replicas – in most cases, blocks of wood immaculately sculpted, sanded clean, and painted with impeccable precision to create seductive *trompe l'oeils*. It also becomes evident – albeit more gradually – that the carefully spaced wall pieces, which resemble records, rulers and pieces of tape among other everyday items, may be read in groups and not simply as individual objects. A meticulously drawn handout provides the viewer with a guide to observe the wall-hung sculptures in specific clusters, which sometimes group like with like, in the case of a few sponge-like imitations, and, in other cases, unlike with unlike. The perfection of exhibition title is underscored as art works become wholes that become parts and then become whole again.



It seems fitting, then, that the successful imitation of common objects is achieved through carefully painted or sculpted 'holes' – absences articulated in black paint on white or raw wood shapes. For example, a black painted block on the table with a square cut out of a corner quickly becomes a block of cut cake. A shapely white vessel becomes a vase because of the black circle on its narrowed top. The barest minimum of material intrusions are selected and executed to elegant visual effect.

The sculptures, read individually or in groups, provide the opportunity to be read forwards and backwards. In some cases, the referent object, such as a hockey puck, materializes before the physical properties of the object are apparent. In other cases, the object's material properties become clues pointing to what the imitating object might be – for example, a white rectangle with carefully painted slips of red along the top only becomes a package of Marlboro cigarettes after some due consideration (although it's possible the difficulty is only faced by non-smokers).

Perhaps the more fundamental question that arises after viewing the exhibition is: what qualities or properties of things are those that help us to recognize things as the things they are? *Parts and Wholes* seems to articulate that the answers to the questions that emerge from the act of looking are never singular and always multiplicitous, and, to that end, deliciously and devilishly duplicitous.

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