



Phoebe McDonald  
*Rise and fall, again*

**firstdraft**

*If light is the medium and space is the medium, then in a sense, the universe is a medium.*<sup>1</sup>

Phoebe McDonald's *Rise and fall, again* challenges the viewer to engage in the *process* of looking rather than the act of seeing. The empirical art of perception is inherent in this body of work. Alluding to naturally occurring rhythms such as breath and the setting of the sun, *Rise and fall, again* explores geometry, tessellation and pattern in reductive form. While each of these works stand alone, together they form a suite where the play of time, light, space, and perception converge. As a series of balsa wood works that are meticulously constructed and obsessively measured, *Rise and fall, again* reminds the viewer of what it means to look and actively engage our cognitive aspects of sight and perception.

In *Rise and fall, again*, McDonald continues her exploration of the durational elements of time, light and shadow, a concept central to her art practice since 2008. McDonald's methodical approach to making via a meticulous construction process becomes time consuming, as each balsa piece is measured, cut and assembled by hand. Although finite as objects, the works in *Rise and fall, again*, are never constant and continue to evolve and resonate long after the making process has ended. The inconsistent quality of natural light provides a depth and dimension that 'moves' with time, generating a visual play on the picture plane. Tonal changes occur as the intensity and angle of light changes throughout the day, creating depth and movement in these reduced and repeated forms.

Avoiding imagery or representation, McDonald plays with the process of looking by creating optical tricks that result from layers of shape and repetition. As constructions of precise angles are made into repetitive patterns, new forms and depths emerge from within the arranged surfaces.

<sup>1</sup> Robert Irwin quoted in Bass J. *Smile of the Buddha: Eastern Philosophy and Western Art*. Berkley: University of California Press, 2005, pg 229.

In 'Rise and fall, again (1)' and 'Rise and fall, again (9)', a series of circles emerge, each interlocking and infinite. As natural light moves across 'Rise and fall, again (7)', shadows cause an illusion of depth, which appears to recede from the actual picture plane. The reductive nature of *Rise and fall, again* encourages pattern to become the image, relying on natural elements outside the frame to add dimension to the artwork.

*Rise and fall, again* develops the viewer's awareness of looking. When looking at these works, the viewer is drawn into the space they themselves create. *Rise and fall, again* heightens perception and acts as a vehicle for sensory immersion. Engaging with these works is a phenomenological process, where the duration spent looking is as much a part of the work as the physical object itself. Over time, there is a shift in the viewer's consciousness and the perception of space becomes intrinsic to the work's existence.

McDonald harnesses three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional plane creating a perceptive quality that plays with and shifts the common language of spatial depth. There is a sensation when viewing a work, that one is only engaging with a portion of it, as though the pattern is infinite and self generates beyond the literal edges of the picture plane, engaging the viewer's imaginative areas of vision. A sense of mediative repetition is produced through the layers of shape and pattern McDonald creates. The viewer actively creates and becomes immersed in a spatial dialogue, bathing in an ever-changing rhythm of light and mood, through the durational continuum of time and space.

The immersive qualities of *Rise and fall, again* enable the work to exist at the convergence of object, image and perception, developed from elements that depend on each other and the space they inhabit.

- Kellee Uhr, 2011



Above: *Rise and fall, again (7)*, 2011, balsa wood, Polyfiller, glue, Forex, 104x112x4cm.  
Front: *Rise and fall, again (1)*, 2011, balsa wood, Polyfiller, glue, Forex, 104x112x4cm.