

ARTFORUM

Richard Ibgby and Marilou Lemmens

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The twenty-two whimsical sculptures that make up Montreal-based Richard Ibgby and Marilou Lemmens's exhibition "Measures of Inequity" look like the products of an especially dexterous arts-and-crafts class at a Marxist elementary school. Each translates a graph or diagram sourced from a scholarly journal that charts the unequal distribution of global wealth—resulting from neoliberal economic policies—into models ingeniously crafted from common household materials. Blond wooden sticks serve as axes, while brightly colored strings trace line graphs, stretched into and held firm by white threads anchored to frames. Translucent colored plastic fills in areas under curves and bar graphs, casting jewel-like shadows on adjacent walls like stained glass. Handwritten titles accompany each work, simply identifying the source image. Given their tabletop scale, many feel decidedly architectural: The alternating peaks and troughs of *Income Inequality in the United States (1910–2010)*, 2016, suggest the skeletal silhouette of a skyline.



Richard Ibgby and Marilou Lemmens, *Income Inequality in the United States (1910–2010)*, 2016, wood, ink, string, 20 x 74 x 1".

The linear structures and strong geometries of these modest constructions evoke the aesthetics of Constructivism. Some resemble handmade prototypes for visionary structures, like Vladimir Tatlin's *Monument to the Third International*, 1920, or Constant Nieuwenhuys's *New Babylon*, 1959–74. Others, owing to their rich colors and charming DIY execution, resemble the forms and structures of children's playground equipment. Together they reveal the ludic impulses that drove much avant-garde experimentation. Through play, humor, and color, these objects counter the cold, hard objectivity of economic data, rendering otherwise immaterial mathematical and statistical abstractions tactile and present. The inevitable bodily droop of the strings compromises the rigid precision of the line graph; the countless tiny knots needed to hold them in place cloud their clarity. The colored plastic induces moments of sublime sensory pleasure. These material effects seem to soften the data—it becomes palatable and possibly even somewhat pliable, making the inequities measured no longer feel irreversible.

— Murtaza Vali

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