David McDonald’s characterization of his solo show at Carter & Citizen as a collection of self-portraits would seem to mark a curious turn for an artist whose committedly abstract paintings and sculptures have long resisted narrative implications. His is that rare brand of abstraction that feels convincingly organic: neither secretly symbolic nor aspiringly decorative; capable of drawing true poetic meaning from the conscientious arrangement of things in themselves — paint, wood, ceramic, cement; circles, squares, lines and curves.

None of that has changed in the current work. In fact, if the term “self-portrait” didn’t appear in the title, it wouldn’t likely come to mind at first. Low to the ground and modest in size, composed of raw and painted wood and cement primarily, the sculptures fall clearly in the vein of McDonald’s other recent work, but for the addition of a single central element in each: a slender, enamel-coated cement column, sheltered or exposed to varying degrees by a host of other fragmentary elements. Gangly, awkward, conspicuously solitary and thus poignantly vulnerable, the columns act as surrogates for a self that might just as well belong to viewer as artist.

Paired with a handful of small, wall-mounted, collage-like pieces that are made primarily from chips of dried paint and also evoke vaguely anthropomorphic associations, the work has a quality of tenderness not lacking in the previous work but merely extended here in a new direction: toward a more explicit exploration of the human condition.

-- Holly Myers