

# ARTFORUM

## New York

CRITICS' PICKS

### Michael Lazarus

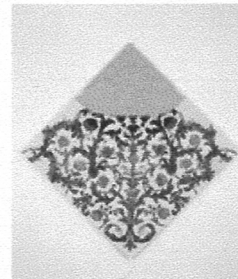
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Those familiar with Michael Lazarus's work won't be surprised at his simplified "happy face"—it's become kind of a signature. What's remarkable is how he connects the emblem's endless potential for variation to his painterly concerns. The smiley motif can be doubled or repeated tenfold in a single work (and looks quite wicked when multiplied); it can also border or "hold" other patterns, such as a subtly abstracted collage of naked flesh (*Untitled*, 2002–03).

In *Taken Back*, 2002, Lazarus creates a latticework of smiles by cutting directly into a piece of wood, enhancing the objectlike quality of the two-dimensional. These paintings are undeniably sculptural, rendered as they are on wood panels coated with glossy layers of oil and enamel paint, in hues from which the less intrepid might shrink: the hottest Pepto-pink against faux wood-grain; saturated orange with grape-candy purple. The latter combination encroaches on a sensuous filigree of blooms and greenery in *One Step Further*, 2002—a title that could double as an acknowledgment of a tenuous equilibrium.



*One Step Further*, 2002.

—Meghan Dailey