



# CRIS BRUCH

December 13, 2014 – March 22, 2015

If That Were Me

APPENDIX



Ghost #6, 2014 (detail)



Perfect Landscape, 2007

## APEX: CRIS BRUCH

### If That Were Me

Born and raised in Missouri, Cris Bruch chose sculpture for his path as an undergraduate and has remained true to the pursuit for over 20 years. Frequently working on a large scale, including major public commissions, he deploys materials as diverse as paper and industrial composites, stainless steel and mahogany, shopping carts, pots and pans, and discarded wine bottles in dynamic, structural combinations. Writing in *Cris Bruch: How Did I Get Here?* (2007), Elizabeth Bryant states "Meanings arise through form and through the perception of time, with the process of making as a central fact in how a piece means."

For his APEX exhibition at PAM, Bruch has created an installation of six multi-media sculptures that echo building shapes observed on long drives across America's farm belt. Meticulously constructed of materials including recycled metal roofing,



Ghost #6, 2014

plywood, crushed corn, and Lincoln Logs, the works are inherently metaphorical. Embedded with content both personal and historic, they are meditations on the transition from rural to urban society and how necessity and American ingenuity can lead to surprising formal results in such utilitarian structures as grain silos.

Bruch's *Ghost* series is based on the artist's observation of the water towers and grain elevators erected to service the railroads of the American Midwest. He is fascinated with how they are built, which he says, "...is not tremendously well in some cases. They're very utilitarian and have often been extensively added on to, often in some pretty wild and improvised ways. On the plains you can see them from miles away..." In essence, the elevators resemble massive, geometric sculptures that disrupt the expansive flatness of the Great Plains with a verticality that arrests the eye and suggests an



See Six States, 2014

attempted human dominance over the landscape. Bruch's structurally complex, multi-faceted sculptures constructed of white milk carton paper relate to architects' models for temples or cathedrals as much as to the modest farm buildings from which they derive, perhaps implying a spiritual kinship among buildings. Bruch has noted that many water towers and grain elevators are now abandoned, becoming thus both nostalgic and cautionary.

Honoring the work's rural materiality, Bruch refers to his monumental, skewed elliptical sculpture, *Wide Open*, 2014, as "a farmhand (Richard) Serra." Constructed of recycled metal roofing material with a wooden understructure, at 96 x 168 x 156 inches, it aggressively fills the museum's relatively small Wintercross Gallery, creating a sense of pressure as it nearly touches the confining walls on all sides. Similar to Serra's *Tilted Arc*, 1981, which dominated the Federal Plaza in New York City, or his *The Matter of Time*, 2005, permanently installed in the Guggenheim Bilbao in Spain, Bruch's *Wide Open* crowds the space it fills, forcing the viewer into uncomfortable proximity. The installation operates in a tightly controlled environment and can never be viewed in its entirety. It is antithetical to the wide open spaces of the Great Plains that inspired it. Once inside the gallery, the viewer is never further than six feet from the sculpture and must move around it to fully experience its form. Bruch's ironic sense of humor is apparent in his titling of *Wide Open* – it is anything but.

At 45 inches high, *See Six States*, 2014, is a diminutive tower constructed of Lincoln Logs. The piece is based on an actual structure, *The World's Wonder View Tower*, built in Genoa, Colorado, during the 1920s by Bruch's great uncles to command a view of six states. The roughly constructed, 65-foot tall wooden tower that Bruch visited as a child must have impressed him as a uniquely designed, out-of-place object commanding (supposed) views of six states that, the artist notes, all looked identical.

Epitomizing the human imperative to construct dwellings, *See Six States* will evoke childhood memories for many viewers. For the artist, the work symbolizes the fictionalized American West. In his words, it is... "a toy that in my mind takes our fascination with the West, with pioneers, with all the myths and popular imaginings of the westward expansion and radically simplifies and obscures that experience, making it possible to just keep fantasizing about the past."

The fabrication process is central to Bruch's work. *Perfect Landscape*, 2007, the earliest work in the exhibition, illustrates the artist's meticulous, time-intensive approach to realizing his sculpture. Made of numerous pieces of half-inch birch plywood, the artist spent hours creating the nearly perfect, hollow spherical form. The care and craft invested in the work's production communicates value. To Bruch, *Perfect Landscape* "has to do with the way we construct a center of our world, which is where we and everything

else that matters comes from; which is the point from which we gauge the relevance of everything else. It's a constructed concept, often involving nostalgic fantasies about some lost, glorious, happy past to which we long to return." His laborious, by-hand process intensifies the sculpture's conceptual strength.

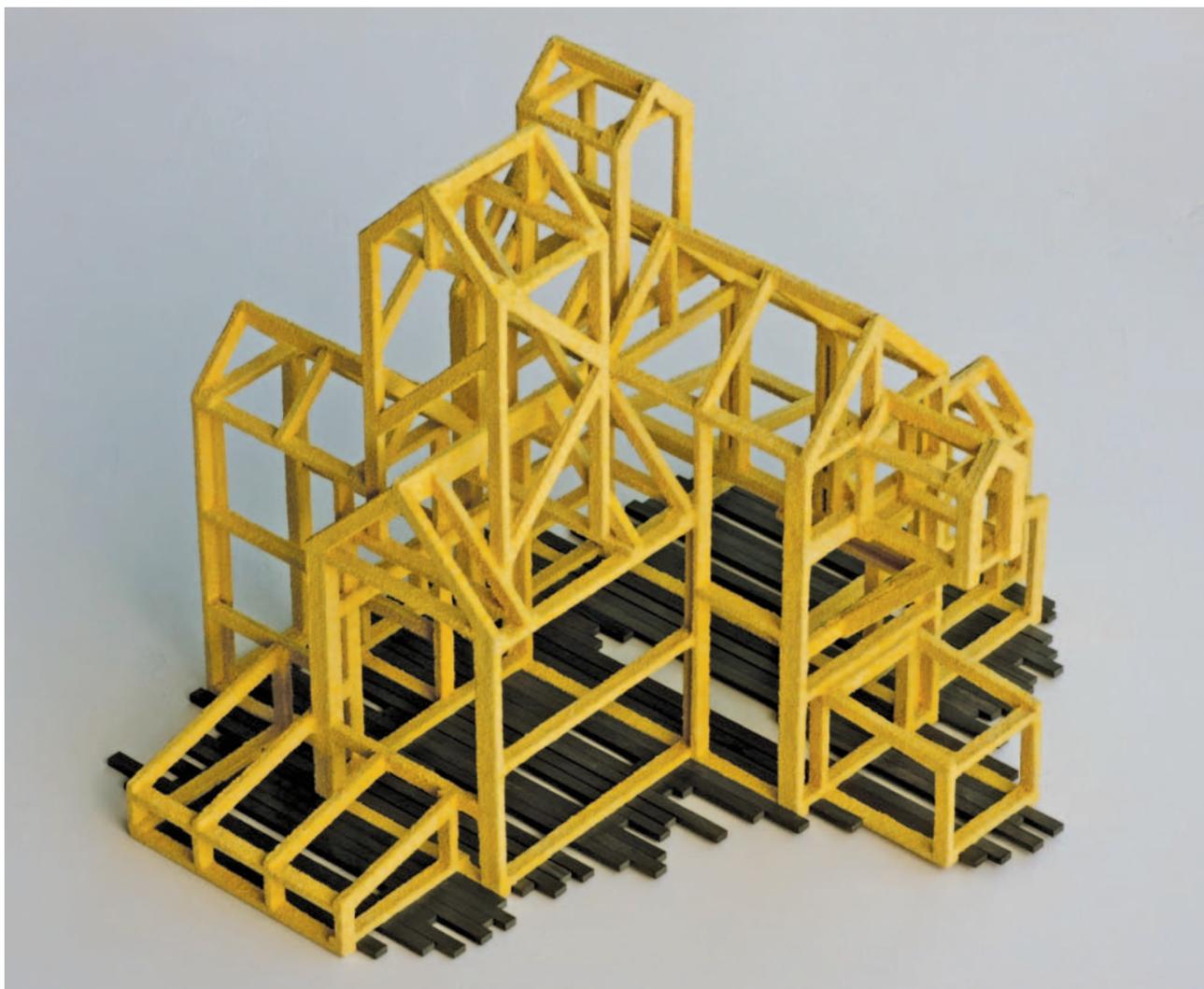
Scale, too, is an essential Bruch strategy. The miniaturized grain elevators, *Ghost #4* and *Ghost #6*, are shown with a maximum amount of wall space separating them. Their small scale against the expansive gallery wall evokes the breadth of the prairie. An effective reversal of scale is found in *See Six States*, which suggests both a massive log structure and a humorous and diminutive child's toy, a parody of forts that were hallmarks of Western expansionism. *Cash Crop*, 2013, is also diminutive, like a dollhouse modeled after a much larger structure. The combina-

tion of large and small works in the exhibition invites reflection on how we perceive and experience scale and what meanings it elicits.

Cris Bruch's sculptures are personal, universal, and quintessentially American. They celebrate and question the rugged farm life of the American Midwest, while maintaining a formal stance as unique, architectural, primarily abstract, objects of art. They are conceived to encourage thought and activate the imagination, and ultimately pay tribute to the human need to build and be remembered.

— Bonnie Laing-Malcolmson

The Arlene and Harold Schnitzer Curator of Northwest Art



Cash Crop, 2013

## BIOGRAPHY

Cris Bruch (American, born 1957) lives and works on Vashon Island, Washington. He earned a BFA in ceramics/sculpture from the University of Kansas, Lawrence in 1980, and an MA and MFA in video and sculpture, respectively, from University of Wisconsin, Madison in 1985 and 1986. Bruch has exhibited nationally and internationally at venues including Flottmann-Hallen, Herne, Germany; Boise Art Museum, Idaho; Salt Lake Art Center, Utah; Suyama Space, Seattle; Galerie Ute Parduhn, Düsseldorf, Germany; and the Tacoma Art Museum. He has received numerous distinguished awards including a Pollock-Krasner Foundation award; Neddy Artists Fellowship, Behnke Foundation; General Services Administration Design Award for Excellence in Art and Architecture; Betty Bowen Memorial Award; and a Public Art Network, 2012 Year in Review, a program of Americans for the Arts. A selection of his public art commissions include Brightwater Environmental Education and Community Center, King County, Washington; Vulcan Inc. Development Project, Seattle; Tri-Met Fifth Avenue Transit Corridor, Portland, Oregon; and the Mt. Si Bridge Replacement Project, North Bend, Washington. Bruch's work is represented in public and private collections such as the Henry Art Gallery at the University of Washington; Seattle Art Museum; Stadtparkasse Düsseldorf; Yale University Art Gallery; Tacoma Art Museum; New York Public Library Print Collection; Portland Art Museum; Microsoft Corporation; and Vulcan Northwest.

## APEX

An ongoing series of exhibitions featuring emerging and established artists living in the Northwest. Presenting contemporary art in the context of the Arlene and Harold Schnitzer Center for Northwest Art, this program continues the Museum's 120-year commitment to exhibiting, collecting, and celebrating the art of the region. APEX is supported in part by The Arlene and Harold Schnitzer Endowments for Northwest Art, The Paul G. Allen Family Foundation, and the Exhibition Series Sponsors.

COVER: Wide Open, 2014



PORTLAND ART MUSEUM



Ghost #4, 2012

## WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

Dimensions: Height precedes width precedes depth

All works courtesy of the artist and Greg Kucera Gallery.

### Ghost #6, 2014

Paper

19 x 14 x 15 ½ inches

### See Six States, 2014

Lincoln Logs

45 x 15 x 16 inches

### Wide Open, 2014

Recycled metal roofing and wood

138 x 168 x 156 inches

### Cash Crop, 2013

Wood, corn, and pigment

37 x 42 x 35 inches

### Ghost #4, 2012

Paper

19 x 17 ½ x 23 inches

### Perfect Landscape, 2007

Birch plywood, epoxy, and pigment

20 ½ x 84 inches in diameter