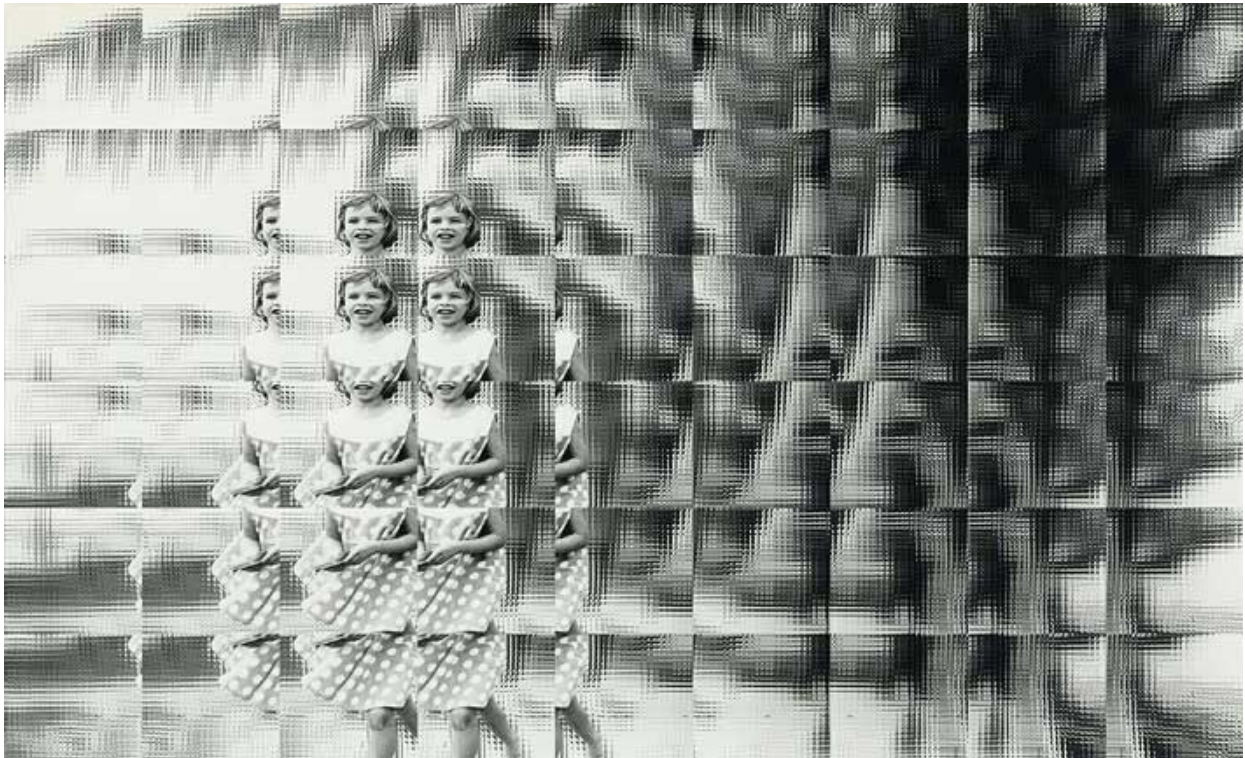


## The Radar Art

By Steve Carter

**Reconstruction Zone: Rusty Scruby weaves sculpture, imagery, music and engineering into genre-defying puzzlers**



Rusty Scruby, *Kwajalein*

How do you categorize an artist who works with woven, interlocking images that burst into the third dimension? What do you call an artist who sculpts paraboloids from playing cards, or weaves orange juice jugs into faceted riddles? Artist Rusty Scruby isn't quite sure himself. "I've been calling them 'mixed media reconstructions,' because I'll use different materials, maybe ink jet prints, or original drawings I'm cutting up," he explains. "I think most of most of my work as sculpture because of the constructive element, even if it's basically two-dimensional. And I guess there's part of me that wants to resist being pigeonholed--almost like things would be off limits then." Since his art

incorporates sculpture, photography, drawing, painting, weaving, music, mathematics and engineering, Scruby's a true original, challenging accepted notions of both the two and three-dimensional. With a background in aerospace engineering, music composition and knitting, Scruby's astonishing creations are brilliant manifestations, intertwining his disparate proclivities.

Examining the warp and woof of the artist's life, his works' conundrums begin to unravel as an intriguing portrait of the artist. Both of his parents were teachers: his father, math and science, his mother, music. Growing up in Oregon and the Marshall Islands, Scruby was always drawing, but recalls that "I practically lived inside the piano. I'd always have the keyboard off; seeing how it worked, listening to it with stopping the strings in different ways." Although he wrote music as a child, he was certain that engineering was his future; he also began to sculpt at a young age, working with clay and paper, cutting, folding and shaping. Years later at Texas A&M, Scruby pursued an aerospace engineering degree but left in his senior year when he realized he could be doomed to a life behind a desk. "I wanted the more abstract, creative side of science," he says. "I started taking music lessons, and that turned into studying composition at North Texas."

At UNT, Scruby wrestled with melding his compositions with visual ideas, and was fascinated with Russian composer Alexander Scriabin's theories of synthesizing musical pitch with color. After two years, he decided to move on and he hasn't looked back. Since then, Scruby's restless explorations have led him to his mixed-media reconstructions, a period in his work dating back to 2000. At that time, he began to experiment with ceramics, fashioning undulating walls of clay. The medium proved too heavy to suit his designs, so he tried again, working with cast paper. When he found that material to be too difficult, he discovered the perfect medium when he transitioned to weaving paper. "A lot of my technique, the paper folding and weaving, comes from knitting," he reveals. "The way yarn overlaps and holds onto itself is how I came up with the constructive part of my work. Since I'd always

worked with paper, even as a kid, it kind of naturally evolved into using the paper and creating facets in a kind of mathematical way.”

The next step in the development of his art involved the incorporation of images. “I wasn’t a photography and I really didn’t want to use other peoples’ images, so I used my baby photos,” Scruby admits. “ Then I started using my own drawings and experiment with photography; I’ve taken thousands of pictures, so at some point I’m going to have to stop saying I’m not a photographer,” he laughs.

Scruby’s subject matters often stick close to home, examining family and nature. “ I love the psychology involved in me drawing a portrait and connecting to the person through the eyes,” he says. “ And I like the way nature reflects things, builds things...I like the structures. There’s a lot of clouds and water in my work, and that’s partly where the undulating surface comes from.” In *Kwajalein*, a monumental (10’ by 15’) woven image, the undulation the artist references also has a musical component. “The background I abstract and the figure [the artist’s sister, Lisa] is cropped out and easier to see,” he elucidates. “ There’s two layers going on, and I’m trying to create a harmony.” While he laughs aside the idea that he’s able to “hear” his images, the musical aspect of the work is nonetheless a vital one. “ I don’t hear it, but I feel tension...if you play an octave, there’s a nice harmony; if you play a minor second there’s a dissonance. In *Kwajalein* it’s that tension and release, and the background and the foreground have different frequencies because one is more in focus and one is more abstract. Working with family photos taps into memory, and working on them distorting them is like putting layers in between reality and experience and remembering.”

On Sept. 16, Pan American Art Gallery will host an exhibition of Scruby’s recent work during Dallas Art Dealers Associations (DADA) Fall Gallery Walk, from 2PM to 8PM.



Rusty Scruby, *Bob & Betty*

Unlike the artist's previous shows at the gallery, which were characterized by colorful imagery and a more analytical, faceted approach, September's exhibition will have a different feel. "This time it's going to be more black and white and drawings and print work on drawing paper," Scruby adds. "This will give me a chance to bring my drawings back--I haven't had drawings in a gallery show in about 10 years. It's kind of the return of that for me...in this show I'm trying to combine the left brain and right brain, so I've got both sides going on."