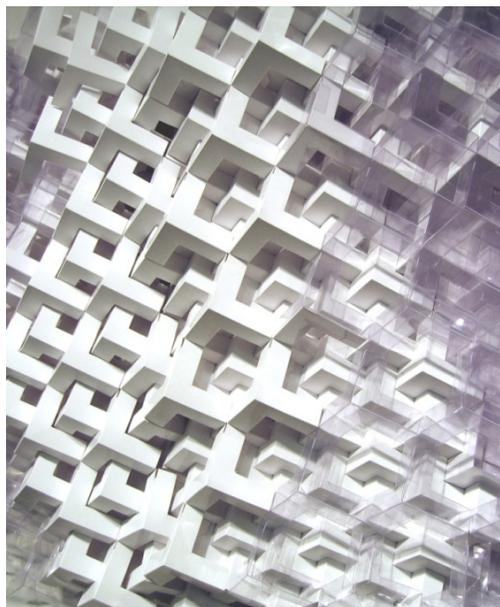


Pan American Art Projects and The MAC: Two Shows by Rusty Scruby

By David Taffet



Calling Rusty Scruby's method of construction autistic is meant only with the utmost admiration. He is a savant, Dallas's own *Rain Man*. Showing at both the MAC and Pan American Art Projects through February 14, gallery personnel offered "obsessive-compulsive" as a better description of his work habits. Only with repetitive precision could he achieve the perfect balance of each his pieces.

Although Mr. Scruby begins each work with a photograph that he has taken, he doesn't think of himself as a lensman. Rather, his art is in the deconstruction and reassembly of the photo using his background in aerospace engineering and music coupled with a familiarity to knitting. He reproduces hundreds of copies of the photo, cuts them into small repetitive shapes or strips and then assembles them into something much greater than

the original shot. Because his finished object is a complex construction that is quite different than its components, he classifies himself as a sculptor.

In some of his more recent creations, he forgoes the photograph and uses clear plastic or white paper to build *Cherry Blossoms*, a 120-by-42-inch wall hanging, *Curved Vessel*, a piece of paper pottery displayed as reverently as an ancient artifact, or *Glass Bottom Boat*, a colossal 184-by-55-inch construction. This last piece uses a three-pronged shape in an arrangement he calls a cube network weave. Light and shadow become an important part of the work.

His use of the three-dimensional cube network weave began with an assembly entitled *Land*. In this first work with this geometric figuration, all of the cubes are pieced together precisely the same. Those in his more recent works like *Glass Bottom Boat* appear more randomly placed, although there's nothing arbitrary about anything Mr. Scruby creates. From various angles, *Land* takes on an assortment of moods. Light and dark from the photograph interact with shadows thrown across the raised ones. As I walked around the work, the gallery director suggested I stand squarely back across the room to view it- as you would a Monet- and she turned off the spotlights. Without the distorting shadows thrown across the composition, which deconstructs the image in the same way the artist does by cutting his originals into small pieces, the disassembled landscape clearly comes back together.

Some of Mr. Scruby's photo reconstructions have bumps and waves built into them. Manipulating what appears to be a simple basket weave by varying the width of the entwined stripes, he forms the bulges and valleys. But this is more than just an experiment with moving beyond a flat canvas. In *Playground*, a dizzying work that began with a photo of a Miami-area tower, gentle undulations supplement the cloud formations, bolder ones appear elsewhere, but only upon close examination can you really be sure that other portions of this frenetic piece are actually woven flat.

At the MAC installation, *Playing in the Sand*, three beach-themed photographic paper reconstructions hang. Made of globe-, zeppelin-, and torpedo-shaped objects, these will surely be among Mr. Scruby's first works to enter a museum collection. Here, as in everything he creates, nothing about the position of each component is random. The relationship of each element to the others is precise. My favorite, *Beach Couple*, hangs in the far corner. The image of two people on the beach is apparent when first walking into the gallery, disappears into the blue ocean while approaching, but reappears from different angles when circling it.

Although *Self Portrait* looks like a charcoal sketch that has been cut into pieces and reassembled, Mr. Scruby's work, as usual, is much more complex. Beginning with over three hundred individual drawings of various parts of his face, he cut and arranged thousands of bits into a 48-by-36-inch assemblage that is a realistic representation of the artist. But one simple self-portrait could never be enough to satisfy this craftsman. In *Faceted Textured Self Portrait*, he builds a canvas that from a distance is a quivering nervous construction in the shape of a bust. Close examination reveals countless pieces of photographs from the first work and serves as the perfect signature to these companion exhibitions.