



installation view

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

1. *Blue Mountain*, 2017, salt glazed stoneware
2. *Baltimore*, 2017, salt glazed stoneware and sycamore
3. *Hoop Party #3*, 2017, salt glazed stoneware
4. *Ryn*, 2017, stoneware, sycamore, and cedar
5. *Rhett*, 2017, stoneware, sycamore, and cedar
6. *Dallin*, 2017, stoneware
7. *Gannon*, 2017, salt glazed stoneware
8. *Ivory*, 2017, salt glazed stoneware
9. *Journey*, 2017, salt glazed stoneware and oak
10. *Community Circle*, 2017, stoneware and assorted wood
11. *Dawnell*, 2017, stoneware and maple (cover)

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BUILDING COMMUNITY

A CERAMICS WORKSHOP
+ COLLABORATIVE
ART INSTALLATION

10 AM to 2 PM

In association with the exhibition, Brandon Reese will work with visitors to make small ceramic houses that, when combined, create a community. The collaborative installation, *Building Community*, will be on view in the museum's artLAB for the duration of the exhibition. This program is offered in partnership with Stillwater Center for the Arts.

This activity is free and open to the public, providing a welcoming atmosphere for visitors of all ages and abilities to participate in hands-on art experiences.



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CONTINGENT STRUCTURES

OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY
MUSEUM of ART

720 S. Husband Street, Stillwater, OK | 405.744.2780 | museum.okstate.edu

Contingent Structures presents a selection of new ceramic sculptures by Brandon Reese. The assembly well illustrates the artist's ongoing exploration of monumental, open-worked constructions that reference human-made archetypal and architectural structures—towers, shelters, and circular enclosures among them. Reese works mostly with salt-fired stoneware, minimally colored. His practice embraces the vagaries of the kiln, just as it relies on the artist's intuitive and conditional engineering of distinct parts into negotiated wholes.

By referring to Reese's sculptures as "contingent structures," two aspects of the works' making are highlighted: first, that they are the result of responsive problem solving, liable to chance, and suggestive of change. Rather than working things out beforehand, Reese composes as he builds and leaves obvious his provisional and playful processes. The second aspect points to the works' precarious-seeming stability, a balance that is dependent on an interlocking network of roughly geometric components. Reese's primary structures employ a post-minimalist array of formal strategies, including the use of modules, grids, and serial systems. Working with a well-defined vocabulary of shapes, where circular and rectilinear forms predominate, Reese builds his latticed sculptures with hand-hewn girders, struts, and trusses—a personal, artisanal aesthetic whose forms allude to containers but whose webbed surfaces supply only the framework for sealed volumes.

"My father used to build houses . . . and I remember going through them when I was young, during the beginning of the building process. It was like being in two places at once. You were inside and outside simultaneously."*



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It is not hard to appreciate how much this early life experience influences Brandon Reese's present sculptures. The basics of construction were encountered as he was becoming himself. Time spent in art school strengthened this course. At the Kansas City Art Institute, Reese studied sculpture and apprenticed with the ceramist Jim Leedy. Leedy showed



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Reese that it was possible to lead the life of an artist. He also facilitated Reese's redirection toward ceramics as his preferred medium. After a period when he thought that ceramics was just making pots, Reese turned to clay because he saw in it a shorter path to creating the kind of sculpture he was interested in making—monumental and immediately responsive to manipulation. He was not interested in perfection, and ceramics allowed a degree of spontaneity that encouraged experimentation. Reese also learned about salt firing from Leedy and completed his first large-scale ceramic sculpture—an open-worked horse—under his guidance.

Later, Reese attended graduate school at Bowling Green State University and studied ceramics under John Balistreri. A series of visiting artists who came to campus during his tenure would have a profound effect on Reese. Peter Voukos was in residence for several months, Jun Kaneko for slightly less time, and Don Reitz for a short visit. Each of these artists is widely celebrated for his contributions to the leadership status American ceramics has enjoyed in the decades since the 1950s. From these successful ceramists, Reese learned the importance of dedication, passion, and maintaining a strong work ethic. Voukos promoted the abstract potential of clay and impressed Reese with his meticulous and analytic manner and the expressive poetry of his work. Kaneko personified perseverance for the young artist, the ability to see a project through despite barriers. Voukos and Kaneko, both, also worked at a scale that proved to be inspirational. Although the time spent with Reitz was shorter, this master of the salt glaze embodied a sense of fun in the studio and was inclusive of the ideas of others. All of these various qualities continue to inform Reese's own studio practice.

Reese, today, embraces a hybrid aesthetic, one that makes clear reference to architectural framing, to drawing, and to the genre of conceptual containers that came of age after the Second World War. His work, composed with a strong linear tracery, often reads as three-dimensional drawing. The scaffolding of his towers, for instance, with their interlaced surface constructions, suggests something unfinished, open to possibility. Their formal vocabulary of bars, grids, and circles constitutes a sort of demotic calligraphy, one that documents the artist's decisions and adjustments. The towers sit on plinths made of found wooden stumps, which are only partially dressed and then supported by strategically sited shims.

The rawness of these bases, their inescapable organic naturalness, contrasts with the refined human intelligence that obviously guided the placement of the ceramic trusses and struts. The idea of a tower as a safe haven or a site of vigilance is complicated by the skeletal framing Reese employs, which is porous, not protective, not containing, but illustrative of the sensation of being inside and outside at the same time, which he once experienced at his father's construction sites.

Despite the abstract, seemingly non-representational characteristics of Reese's work, the viewer's familiarity with his formal toolbox often leads to narrative making. *Ivory*, a five-foot-high, buff-colored, hut-shaped construction, reads as a weathered outdoor shelter. Or is it an over-large maquette for an enormous civic edifice? One can imagine ground level shops, office and domestic spaces on the four stories above, and light-flooded rooms. An oculus is tucked into the curve of the roofline. Interpreting this form is not unlike making out the particulars of ancient ruins like Pompeii, where scant architectural remains only hint at what once was.

Other sculptures evoke less concrete associations. Reese's small-scale hoops have an expressionistic irregularity that suggests movement and whirling energy. His freestanding wheels, more than six-feet in diameter, are architectural in form, encompassing in scale, and a marvel of low-tech construction. "I enjoy the challenge of testing the limits of clay as a material by making it do things I haven't seen it do before," Reese has stated. "Not letting technical parameters dictate what I make, and pushing beyond those parameters, is important."**

Like his artist forebears, Brandon Reese is steadily pursuing an original trajectory. Mindful of ceramic's history, reflective of life experiences, passionate about his time in the studio, Reese has built a diverse oeuvre that is unified by the ambitious vision he holds for what ceramics can be. That continued promise of experimentation, mutation, and advance is announced in each of Reese's contiguous structures, as the current exhibition makes very clear.

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* Brandon Reese as quoted in John Zimmerman, "The Structure of Things: The Sculpture of Brandon Reese," *Ceramics Monthly*, February 2010, 58. ** Ibid.