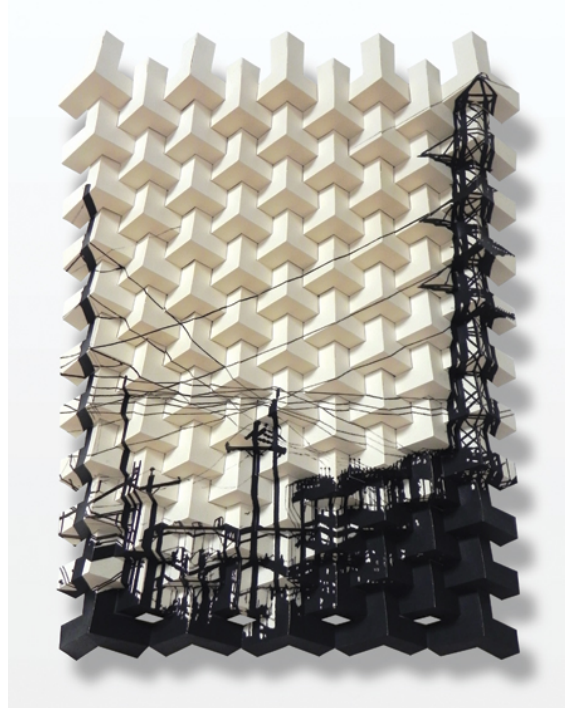


Rusty Scruby

By Devon Britt-Darby

Listening to Dallas-based artist Rusty Scruby discuss his meandering life trajectory and the disparate influences informing his latest series--Mexican dust storms, piano composition and bad-boy Parisian haute couture--one might expect an eclectic, even unfocused body of work. But the paper constructions in "Cube Networks and Cherry Blossoms," Scruby's second solo exhibition at Houston's McMurtrey Gallery (June 2 - July 7), make for as tightly structured and cohesive a group of images as you're likely to find. Not to mention obsessive. "I've tried to have assistants before, but I drive them a little nuts," says Scruby, 47, who cuts and glues together hundreds of interlocking circles, squares, rectangles and hexagons himself, creating photographic reconstructions and 3-D drawings that defamiliarize their original sources to varying degrees.



Grids and repetition lie at the heart of his practice, which apply lessons learned during undergraduate engineering studies and a lifetime spent making stitches and tickling the ivories. "I grew up knitting, and I had these weird kinds of influences--music and playing piano and knitting and math," he explains. "I play music every day. It's part of my thinking as far as creating tension and resolution, and now numbers are really at the basis of creating harmony and dissonance... I'm always investigating stitches and how things hold on. That's where a lot of my structure ideas come from."

Scruby's folded-paper *Cube Network* pieces originate with photography but are actually deconstructed charcoal drawings reassembled into interwoven modular units. They grew out his recent experiments with knitting inspired by repeat visits to "The Fashion World of Jean Paul Gaultier: From the Sidewalk to the Catwalk," which made its US premiere at the Dallas Museum of Art before traveling to San Francisco's de Young Museum, where it remains on view through August 19. "Usually crowds drive me nuts, but I was standing in the middle of it for like two hours and not being phased," Scruby says. "All the crocheting and knitting left me so energized. I spent the past six months figuring out how to create, out of knitting, this actual 3-D shape and putting black yarn in it to create images."

Scruby based the *Cube Networks'* imagery on photos shot outdoors either at dusk--"I love it when things are in transition," he says--or, in the case of his *Rip Van Winkle* series, after emerging from his studio just after a dust storm from Mexico had blown into town. "The sky was completely brown and glowing," he says. "It was in the middle of the day and I couldn't see the sun." (The title refers to the temporal and physical sense of dislocation he experienced that afternoon.)

A different kind of dislocation occurs in the *Cherry Blossoms pieces*, which he bases on photos of subjects ranging from flowerbeds to overpasses and initially designs using photo-editing software. They relate to and depart from his 2010 McMurtrey show, which featured works constructed from multiple reproductions and enlargements of old family photographs to create what he calls "visual frequencies." "Each circle would have a section of an image, like a puzzle piece with all the full photo detail within that circle," Scruby says. "Now I blur and pick the color point in the center and build the image by reducing the information that way. And then I'm kind of using the texture to blend it back together."

Originally from Oregon City (OR), Scruby's practice could be described as blending back together the various components of an admittedly piecemeal

education. He began his studies at Texas A&M University, where he studied aerospace engineering before switching to musical composition and transferring to the University of North Texas, only to realize he was more of a visual artist. The process took nine years and culminated in a successful career, though not a degree. "That made my parents real happy," he quips. "But 20 years later, all my student loans are paid off."