

Steve Reber

Steve Reber is represented by sculptures and wall drawings from 2003 to the present. Reber has been active in Chicago as a sculptor and educator since the mid 1990's, after a move from Baltimore MD. Reber's work investigates questions of how architecture, memory and material recombine in an oddly perfect world of precision, logic and emotion. He uses two paradoxical strategies: geometry and intuition. His geometric approach is reduction to simple forms and outlines, the intuitive; the manufactured materials and found objects in an undetermined, often playful collaboration.

There is an immediate sense of architecture or function in Reber's sculptures and drawings. They appear to be models or maps for some kind of system or operation—a schematic diagram of a factory, a manufacturing process or transit route—yet any suggestion—beyond a hint—is not given. This is a result of the reductive quality of this work. His material refinement of simple, clean lines and shapes suggest a human-made landscape without speaking to any obvious function. This is our entry point as viewer. Where have we seen shapes like this? What might be happening here?

The two pieces along the gallery windows, *You're the Flower I'm the Dirt* and *I Don't Travel Far*, suggest most strongly an architecture of use. But their titles reveal something more emotional at play. *You're the Flower I'm the Dirt* references a relationship—the *you* and *I* in the title and the tension of materials: heavy, crude blocks of concrete contrasting the delicacy of wood grain and smooth enamel surfaces. The silver 'tanks' may stand for reservoir or containers of something, probably precious, that courses through this refinery process. *I Don't Travel Far*, squarish and playfully abstract, relates a mode of transportation that really leads nowhere.

Reber uses familiar surfaces and materials from our everyday life—plywood, laminates, plaster, Styrofoam and contact paper—to construct his sculptures. He often adds found objects such as boxes, sponges, string and food cans to the sculptures, which invite a further level of subjective interpretation into the work. They suggest commerce and function and encode a modern world of manufactured goods. This juxtaposition between the arrangement of silent, precisely construction elements with recognizable objects of the known world creates a curious, delightful tension and balance in the work. *Gunstock and Peony*, Reber combines wood grain veneer and Korean drink boxes in an assemblage reminiscent of a site for commerce. Here, converging planes and levers offer pressure and support to cargo moving along many axes.

Reber is also interested in interior and exterior space. *Untitled Wall*, in the center of the gallery, suggests a construction site—a solid wall section supported and surrounded by an odd scaffold of beams and pillows, and plumbed by a renegade mason's line that lazes and pools in a rather nonchalant manner. The companion pieces *Model 1014* and *Wash Out Inn* also suggest sites of use, containers or dwellings that imply modernist utopian notions of perfection, economy and modularity.

Reber references modernist vision not as critique or nostalgic longing, but as reminder that those utopian experiments in space, material and function are not over. His sculptural work has much of the same economy of design and material found in contemporary architecture, especially the

movement toward intimate, affordable and recycled dwellings. His sculptures—like architectural spaces—suggest where we might place ourselves, both physically and emotionally, in his constructed world-view.

Doug Stapleton
Assistant Curator
Illinois State Museum Chicago Gallery