

Industrial Nature

A Conversation Between Object and Architecture

>>Nebulous shapes and architectural insight, the seemingly mismatched marriage of organic and synthetic, thrive within the sculptures of acclaimed artist Kendall Buster.

Somewhere between abstract abodes and biological remnants, her large-scale creations entice both the eye and the body, and offer the viewer the rare opportunity to truly experience art.

These mammoth orbs of steel and South African shade cloth are reminiscent of a cored pear or a beehive with a slice removed. These missing cross-sections are an essential component of one of Buster's chief intentions.

The "accessible interiors," a distinguishing characteristic in Buster's work, allow for a more profound interaction with the piece. The onlooker is invited inside to not only view the structure, but to be enclosed within it.

"For a lot of people, it's the simple act of penetrating a form," says Buster. "You're so accustomed to having this relationship to a sculpture where you're over here and the sculpture is there and you're walking around it and very separated from it. You can certainly enter it with your eye, but to enter a piece with your body is a kind of commitment."

Once inside, a myriad of reactions ensue. From



playfulness and ease to uneasiness and intrigue, Buster wants the viewer to respond in some manner, any manner, just as long as it is genuine and unexpected.

Influenced by the work of twentieth-century theorists Jacques Lacan and Michel Foucault, Buster attempts to incarnate their thoughts on the act of seeing and being seen. Fusing biology with architecture, Buster creates imposing sculptures that are interactive playgrounds where exploration and physical interaction are encouraged. Buster extends this facet through the use of translucent fabrics, which allows viewers to interact with one another by way of the sculpture.

"Those inside the piece can see those outside the piece and vice versa so there is a little bit of a play there, which I find very interesting," says Buster. "[The inside] is a small space, an intimate space. It's truly a chamber and that leads to feelings of either enclosure or comfort. I like this idea of something being both comforting and threatening."

Suggestive of a cocoon or a womb, these membrane-covered structures envelope the viewer in a manner foreign to most human adults. Buster, who is currently a professor of sculpture at Virginia Commonwealth University's School of Arts, finds the worlds of biology and architecture intrinsically linked.

"I think there are a lot of interesting things to think about in terms of architecture's biological roots and the whole notion of how biological forms have informed certain kinds of designs," says Buster. "For me, the vessel and architecture are really about marking an empty space."

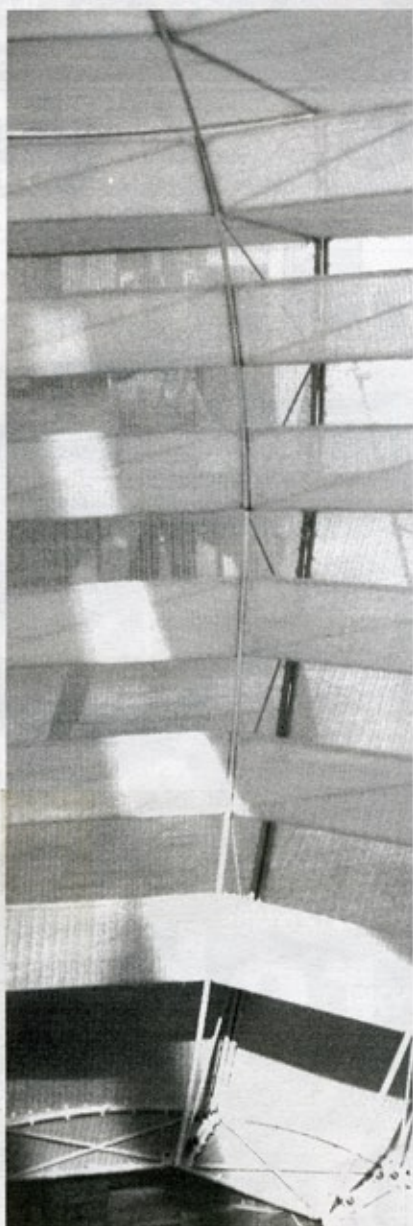
Having studied microbiology at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa, Buster has always been fascinated by biological structures. From fungal formations to exoskeletons, Buster's science background is clear in her sculptures.

"In one sense, I know it's a very romantic notion, but there is a part of me that is very attracted to what I see as a kind of completeness in natural forms," says Buster. "There is nothing more complete than an egg, and probably nothing less mechanical. And yet, it is really a beautiful form. These kind of forms seem to have a kind of confidence and internal logic, and seem to be guided by constructing principles that are just there, almost on a cellular level."

However, Buster does not want people to focus on her science background and its influence on her sculptures. She wants people to experience them and enjoy them as individual entities, without any preconceived affiliations or characteristics. Then, Buster hopes, the viewer will truly appreciate the sculpture and the many nuances that make these structures unique, somewhere between object and architecture. **VS**

Left: The artist herself, Kendall Buster inside one of her sculptures.

Right: Yellowhighrise (Model #2).



Kendall Buster's creations of biological architecture will be on display at the Haggarty Museum of Art at Marquette University until January 7. Highrisevessel is a three-month exhibit that will feature two installation pieces, Yellow Highrise (Model #2) and White Highrise (Model #3); the latter for which Buster was awarded the 2005 prize in art at the American Academy of Arts and Letters Annual Invitational.