

BOISE, IDAHO

Mike Rathbun

Boise Art Museum

The muscular arc of Mike Rathbun's *The Situation He Found Himself In* became visible as soon as one entered the foyer of the Boise Art Museum. Even from a distance, this soaring tour de force made momentum visible. The tilted elliptical ring, 73 feet across its longer axis and held aloft by X-shaped supports, ascended through a spacious gallery and seemed to burst through the wall and out into the Sculpture Court before boomerang-

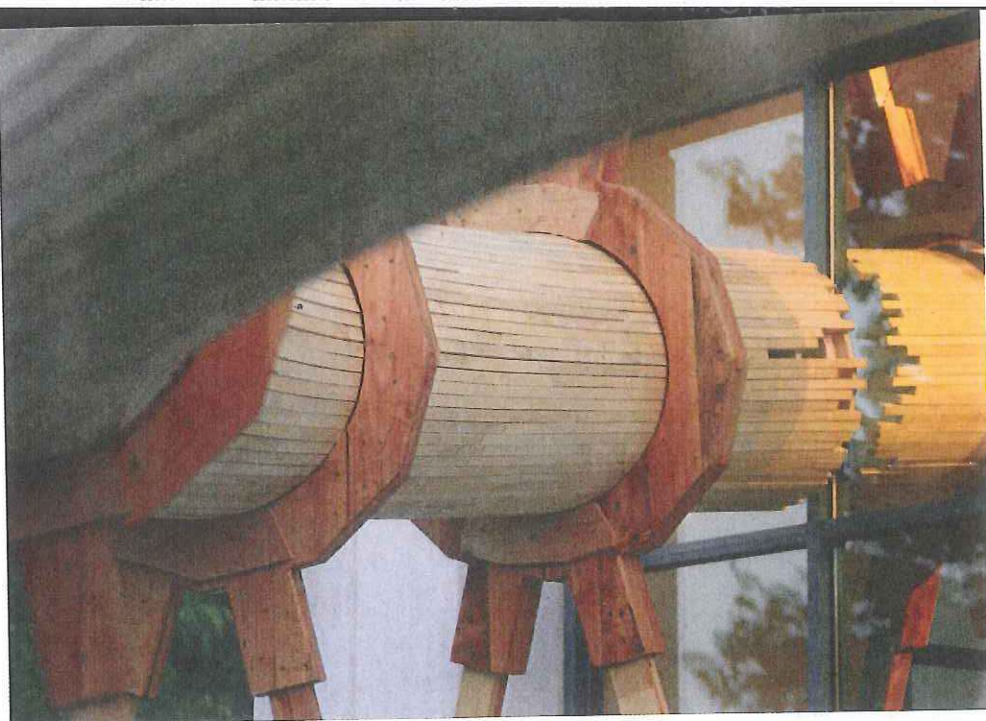
ing back into the building through an adjacent room.

The Situation He Found Himself In was constructed of sustainable Pacific Northwest lumber, which Rathbun has employed almost exclusively over the many years of his career. Pacific Albus, a poplar hybrid (and "green" timber) harvested at the east end of the Columbia Gorge (not far from Rathbun's home in Portland) formed the pale core of the ellipse. The 14 struts hoisting it into the air were built from Douglas fir, the region's emblematic workhorse wood.

Rathbun conceived a project so huge that there was no choice but to assemble it in situ, a methodology that introduced an element of risk and demanded working out, with exquisite precision, the conceptual mathematics of construction. Before arriving in Boise, preparations included the ripping of 1,400 slats to accommodate the bend of the ellipse. *The Situation He Found Himself In* was erected, with near-miraculous efficiency and speed, by a team of 10 people working 12-hour days for two weeks. (The same team aided Rathbun in 1995, when he built a

Mike Rathbun, *The Situation He Found Himself In* (detail), 2011. Pacific Albus, Douglas fir, cedar, and hardware, 73 ft. diameter.

boat and solo-sailed it across Lake Michigan for his MFA thesis project.) The intensity of the on-site building process is intrinsic to Rathbun's work. He says that the making of the sculpture is the true artwork, while the final manifestation is simply the record of the journey—a solid, three-dimensional composite of the concepts, energy, and physical effort that went into the construction.



Above and detail: Mike Rathbun, *The Situation He Found Himself In*, 2011. Pacific Albus, Douglas fir, cedar, and hardware, 73 ft. diameter.

There is an honesty to his exposed nails and screws, the intentional gaps in the sheathing, the remnant scribbles on the wood. At BAM, especially at the points where the sculpture seemed to puncture interior and exterior, one could peer through to the core and see how it was constructed. Raw and unfinished, the wood changed over the course of the show—particularly the outdoor section—further emphasizing

the impermanence of the work: at the end of the installation, the sculpture was dismantled and recycled.

Rathbun's earlier works incorporated symbolic representations, like boats, aircraft, thorns, and chains. The Boise work, in contrast, relied on abstract formal qualities to convey its theme, which Rathbun calls "heroic/pathetic irony"—by which he means the tension between the

sacred and profane, between lofty aspiration and mundane drudgery. The skeletal fir supports were readily anthropomorphized: with feet planted firmly on the ground and arms raised, they appeared under-burdened for their burden. It was as if the sculpture were a metaphor for the vicissitudes of life.

The title was appropriated from a conversation between Rathbun and his brother Russell, a Lutheran

clergyman. A story from Rathbun's youth illustrates one potential interpretation. As a teenager, he was a runner and dreamed of competing in the Olympics. But he started smoking, and the "situation he found himself in" pitted worthy ambition against human weakness.

Rathbun states, "I am trying to find epiphanies. These are moments when for reasons that I cannot explain, I seem to be connected to something outside of myself...I experience a moment of clarity; clarity about what, I don't know...Perhaps it is what C.S. Lewis calls a desire for heaven." With tools in hand and using unassuming materials, Rathbun-the-carpenter becomes Rathbun-the-artist, momentarily arresting transcendence in a work of art.

—Linda Tesner

WEST HOLLYWOOD

Andrea Zittel

Regen Projects

With postmodern savvy, Andrea Zittel's new works study frontierism as a phenomenon whose legacy continues to reverberate within the American imagination. Her recent exhibition featured examples from two distinct bodies of work. One, a room-scaled installation, extends traditional definitions of sculpture as an object that re-presents the real in mimetic fashion. The second presents a phenomenally rich, ongoing body of work that celebrates traditional women's work as art.

Absent from this exhibition were the *A-Z Living Units* that brought Zittel recognition in the early 1970s. These works offered conceptual solutions to the high costs and small spaces of living quarters in cities like L.A. and New York. Over the years, Zittel has created an array of different series, all named *A-Z* works, referencing her initials. Winking at the consumer culture practice of branding products, in the mid-'90s, she began to probe