

CHAREST-WEINBERG

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The sculpture of Rob Fischer is particularly American insofar as it echoes a number of themes which assume ever increasing importance as the millennium begins to define that which approaches it. On the surface the work is almost utopian in its embrace of a value system which promotes self-sufficiency and rugged individualism as aesthetic ends. Fischer's environments all work- emblematically at least- in terms of survival habitats. They are, in the bricolage tradition, literally accumulations of that which has been cast off to await recycling into that which has not previously existed. Their curious architectural marriage of shelter and folly is born, in equal parts, of necessity and bravado.

The notion of building as a marker of permanence in the landscape is, on the American Great Plains, an existential romance that is not reinforced by wither climate or culture. In the endless sweep of prairie that sprawls from Oklahoma to the highlands of the Canadian Laurentians, architectural originality is often, in the ominous face of nature, an act of hubris. Cities do not sprawl, their buildings cling together like mourners at a funeral. And, until the advent of the suburban that devours that which is not farmed, a town was a cluster of shingled cottages where the shop keepers and civic servants dwelled to simply provide the services needed by those who farmed the land between the towns. The farmers knocked together homesteads, surrounded them with trees, planted their crops, tended their livestock, and hoped for the best. In the often bitter end, the best increasingly meant an aluminum-sided trailer parked in front of the crumbling homestead.

Robert Fischer's sculptures poetically capture the cycles of hope and despair which is the American Heartland. His work implies both domestic utility and benign separatism, an adherence to traditional values, and offensive pragmatism. Fischer is from Minnesota and his sculpture is all about being tied to the land and the drive to escape the burden that is inherent in that indentured relationship. His elementary structure is inevitably utilitarian- It is a place to live- but it is also determinately mobile. Fischer's domiciles do not work if they are rooted, if they are definitively in place. The tension in his structures comes from their willingness to adapt to the inevitability of calamity, from their secondary agenda as escape vehicles. His habitat-sculptures are made to be hitched to a truck, float on a crested lake, paddled down a river to the sea. They are ad hoc mobile homes which bespeak indomitability and longing. They are an intimate portrait of the artist and markers for an embattled dream of utopian democracy. Nothing survives in America better than a survivor. Robert Fischer's work, in its ambiguous juxtaposition of home and flight, cuts to the heart of the heartland.

Richard Flood

