

Motor City Interventions: Scott Hocking's Renegade Sculpture

BY HUNTER BRAITHWAITE, MODERN PAINTERS | NOVEMBER 13, 2015



Scott Hocking's "Ziggurat, East, Summer," 2008, a mixed media installation and photo project from Ziggurat and FB21, 2007-09. (Courtesy the artist and Susanne Hilberry Gallery, Detroit)

My afternoon with Hocking began in his studio in Detroit's North End neighborhood and ended as we pushed past the stripped-and-burned corpse of a pickup truck near the banks of the Rouge River, once so polluted that it caught fire. Using materials found while exploring the city's abandoned buildings, Hocking makes sculptures that channel the grand mythology— and desolation—of his hometown. He has built a giant egg-shaped cairn out of marble found in the deserted Michigan Central Station, and installed a ziggurat in the (likewise abandoned) Fisher Body plant. For another project, he placed televisions atop columns that once supported the long-collapsed roof of the Packard plant. When we spoke, he was recovering from a pinched nerve—suffered while creating a piece that involved disassembling a barn and then reconstructing it, upside down, in the Upper Peninsula—and preparing to take over an abandoned train station in Lille, France, with his version of the Tower of Babel.

Fittingly for someone so interested in creation and destruction, Hocking's artistic career began when his car was T-boned three days before he was supposed to depart for a new life as a fisherman in Seattle in 1996. The resulting concussion—and the citation for driving with a suspended license—kept him in the Motor City, where he enrolled at the local College for Creative Studies, focusing on sculpture. Since then, he has stayed in Detroit, creating entropic monuments to its decline and rebirth. The process is arduous, involving long hours in precarious conditions, working alongside the city's homeless, the scrappers gutting buildings, and the plentiful feral dogs.

“The generic feeling,” Hocking says of Detroit's many decaying buildings, “is that they're eyesores; a remnant of a greater past that has been lost.” But as a native, he's always felt something affecting in these spaces: “not only the size and the scale and the architecture,” he says, “but the beauty of how nature takes them apart.” By situating primitive iconography within a crumbling industrial setting, Hocking seems to both halt and hasten the flow of time. The sculptures face vandalism, the elements, and, in the case of the Fisher Body plant ziggurat (made with carcinogenic, creosote-treated bricks), EPA condemnation. While the physical objects may disappear, Hocking keeps meticulous photographic documentation. As many of the locations for his site-specific interventions are redeveloped as part of a citywide renaissance, the artist's pictures capture a slowly vanishing desolation.



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Scott Hocking

The Secrets of Nature, 2013

Mixed media installation

Art X exhibition Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit

Courtesy the artist and Susanne Hilberry Gallery, Detroit

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Scott Hocking

The End of the World (exhibition shot), 2012

Mixed media installations and photography

Susanne Hilberry Gallery, Detroit

Courtesy the artist and Susanne Hilberry Gallery, Detroit

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Scott Hocking

The Egg and MCTS #4718, 2012

Mixed media installation and photography project

From The Egg and Michigan Central Station, 2007-2012 Detroit

Courtesy the artist and Susanne Hilberry Gallery, Detroit

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Scott Hocking

Narcissus Incorporated, 2015

Mixed media installation

Former Pickle Factory, Detroit Detroit Boom City

Curated by Dashboard Co-op, Atlanta

Courtesy the artist and Susanne Hilberry Gallery, Detroit

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Hephaestus and the Garden of the Gods, 2011

Mixed media installation and photo project

From Garden of the Gods, 2009-2011 Detroit

Courtesy the artist and Susanne Hilberry Gallery, Detroit

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Scott Hocking

Emergency Ark (working title) in progress, June – August, 2015

Site-specific sculpture created from deconstructed barn Port Austin, Michigan

Courtesy the artist and Susanne Hilberry Gallery, Detroit

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