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Above: Installation view of "La scultura italiana del XX secolo," at the Fondazione Arnaldo Pomodoro, Milan. Below: Kirsteen Pieterse, *Fell*, 2005. Balsa wood, 35 x 150 x 50 cm.

In the '60s, artists of the Arte Povera group (Mario Merz, Marisa Merz, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Jannis Kounellis, Gilberto Zorio, Giuseppe Penone, Giovanni Anselmo, Alighiero Boetti, Luciano Fabro, and others) introduced a new way to make art, to be an artist, and to express poetic ideas—a model in which the artist acted more as theater director than creator of art.

Other sculptors of the '60s (Giovanni Spagnolo, Mauro Staccioli, Giuseppe Uncini, and Gianfranco Pardi) investigated the interrelation of space, balance, and material, creating works in which material imposes form. Their sculptures modify our perception of space and material and suggest a different way of perceiving and decoding the world around us.

The diversity of works by artists of more recent generations (including Enzo Cucchi, Luigi Ontani, Nunzio, and Mimmo Paladino through Giuseppe Gabelloni, Antonio Riello, Antonio Trotta, and Maurizio Savini, among others) testified to the high standard and quality of contemporary Italian sculpture. To quote from Meneguzzo's catalogue essay, "All Italian sculptors, it does not matter how different their work, are similar;

they are similar in their being faithful to 'the making' of the work which has an important role in their creative process."

—Laura Tansini

SYDNEY

Kirsteen Pieterse Martin Browne Fine Art

An architectural model signifies an idea, a dream—potential. Using foam core and balsa wood to construct sculptures that resemble small-scale abstract bridges, aqueducts, and skyscrapers, Kirsteen Pieterse engages with the aspirations of architecture. Crisp and clean, the sculptures in her show "Subside" are

symbols of the built environment, miniature examples of the creative possibilities in the manmade.

Pieterse's works are constructed through the regular intersection of tiny crossbeams, a technique that creates a structurally sound and rigidly rhythmical pattern. Despite their regular geometry and precision, these cold and industrial structures embody a significant contradiction: they are both deliberately rational and inherently futile. The dense patterns of struts and beams resemble scaffolding systems, but devoid of their purpose, they are meaningless, neither supporting nor surrounding. They exist to fill space. Pieterse's sculptures are models of structures that have no purpose other than as manifestations of man's primal need to expand and explore—to push boundaries, conquer difficult terrain, and claim territory by force and physical occupation. Yet within the work, this expansionist urge consistently confronts its own limitations. Each carefully engineered sculpture is initially perfect, but then something seems to go wrong. Edges collapse and crumble, critical supports disintegrate, sections lean and threaten to tumble off. Architectural order descends into chaos again and again.

This persistent failure lends Pieterse's structures added intrigue. It is not clear if the damage they sustain is a kind of planned obsolescence, a nod toward the perpetual

cycle of production, consumption, and destruction that feeds the voracious appetite of late-capitalist economies, or if it points to the inevitable rise and fall of any civilization. At the very least, the sculptures acknowledge the essential transience of all manmade structures, no matter how sophisticated and determined, in the face of the inexorable and unpredictable power of nature.

In fact, these structures seem to conjure entire miniature worlds where technocratic societies struggle in a hostile and dangerous environment, like TV colonists who have reached the outer limits of "space, the final frontier." Pieterse worked on special effects for the *Matrix* trilogy, so perhaps it's not surprising that her sculptures radiate a sci-fi atmosphere. In *Cleft*, an elegant structure seems to have been struck by a giant meteor or crushed by the fist of a vengeful god.

These structures have suffered massive collateral damage, yet they hover in a mysterious zone between hope and despair. Highlighting vulnerability, hubris, and tenacity, they seem to celebrate humanity in all our complexity: dangerous and systematic, intelligent and wilfully arrogant, catastrophically destructive yet capable of creating things of great beauty. Pieterse's sculptures are battered but not beaten; crushed and bruised, they teeter but refuse to fall.

—Tracey Clement

