

Currier Hosts Show by 2007 Fellow

Test your sea legs: you'll need them to walk through – and over, and under, and around – Kirsten Reynolds' installation at the Currier Museum of Art in Manchester.

"There's nothing here that's at a right angle," says Kirsten of *The Former*



Artist Fellow Kirsten Reynolds makes a big splash with a show at the Currier Museum of Art in Manchester.

Photos by Jane Eklund

Mistake, a gallery-sized assemblage of faux 2-by-4's and planking caught mid-topple, freeze-frame style. For the artist, that means a planning process of "constant, continual analysis of structural stability"; for the viewer, it means an experience that's both delightful and vaguely disconcerting. Enter the room and you become part of the piece – its tumble and sway, its precarious balance.

"What happens if you start to imagine architecture as fluid?" asks Kirsten, who envisions her work as theater, as a visual narrative that the viewer enters, becoming in the process both actor and audience.

The Former Mistake inaugurates a new series at the Currier called "Spotlight New England," which features innovative work by artists who live in New England (and New Hampshire, in particular). Kirsten's

show there, adjacent to an Andy Warhol exhibit, is a feather in the already multi-feathered cap of an artist who earned a BFA from Syracuse University in 1994 and an MFA from the Maine College of Art in 2004.

"It's been a very busy, really productive five-year span. I'm really thrilled to see where it's gone, and excited to see where it's headed," she says of her work.

Halfway through that five-year span, in 2007, Kirsten, who lives in Newmarket, won an Individual Artist Fellowship from the State Arts Council (an award she calls "pivotal," and that came at a time when she was preparing for a show, and for parenthood – Soren, her son with husband Pete Lankford, a designer at Timberland, is now 2). That was followed up with a \$26,000 Artist Advancement Fellowship from the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation, Greater Piscataqua Region. In addition to the Currier show, she's mounted solo installation exhibits at the Hallwalls Contemporary Art Center in Buffalo, the Contemporary Art Center in North Adams, Mass., The Vox Populi in Philadelphia, and ArtSpace in New Haven, among others. She's been part of group expeditions at the DeCordova Museum and Sculpture Park in Lincoln, Mass., the Boston Center for the Arts, and the New Hampshire Institute of Art.

She calls *The Former Mistake* her most ambitious show to date, and it's one that's particularly gratifying because its construction involved young people in the museum's artist-in-residence program. (The young artists went on to create their own installation pieces.)

The Currier, a State Arts Council Operating Grant recipient, provided Kirsten with the gallery space, and put no limits or requirements on its use other than meeting fire safety codes and the

like. "This was her empty canvas, blank slate, empty box," says Sharon Matt Atkins, the curator of the exhibition.

Kirsten began by creating, in her studio, a scale model of the gallery, with a one-inch to one-foot ratio. She then constructed a miniature version of the artwork inside the gallery model, taking photographs to assess scale and perspective. She prepared the materials – the load-bearing planks and boards are made of wood, but most are insulation foam and foamcore panels, painted to look like wood or, in the case of the planks, stenciled or silk-screened in colorful origami paper patterns.

of simultaneous construction and destruction" in her curatorial essay. "In *The Former Mistake*, Reynolds ultimately challenges us to question our perceptions of not only her fabricated space, but also the world in which we live. How do we navigate our daily environments? How often do we stop to consider our choices and movements? By creating a space that teeters between the real and imagined, Reynolds renders both realms unstable."

The show opened in November, 2008, with a scheduled run through February 15, 2009.

– Jane Eklund

"What happens if you start to imagine architecture as fluid?"

– Kirsten Reynolds

In the Currier galleries, Kirsten assembled the materials, with the help of the art students and museum staff. She populated the installation with shiny, globby "creatures," polyurethane forms that resemble plants or animals but aren't quite either.

The project took three weeks, during which the gallery space was open to visitors, who often engaged Kirsten in conversation, offering opinions and asking questions.

"There's collective energy and activity that goes into these things, and it's a lot like a barn-raising that goes on in rural Pennsylvania," she notes. (Kirsten knows about Pennsylvania barn-raising, having grown up near Allentown.)

The result is something that's both barn-raising and barn-razing, what Sharon, the show's curator, terms "a moment

