



BUSTER GRAYBILL

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ABSTRACT
UTILITY

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SEPT 6 - NOV 23 - 2019

Abstract Utility is a selection of gallery-based works and a new, mobile installation. The range of work showcases Graybill's artistic practice that examines and celebrates the rich cultural life of rural America, while considering geography and stories, collective lore and personal memories.

FORT WORTH CONTEMPORARY ARTS



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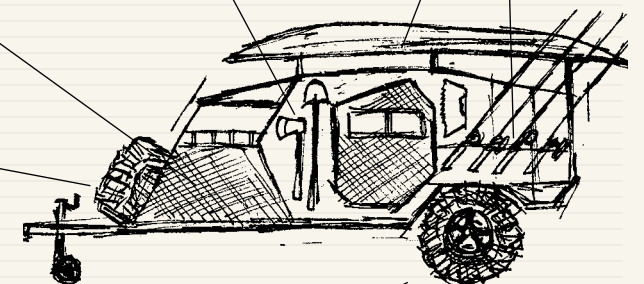


Mobile chicken coop

Basic gardening tools
for survival

Kayak and
fishing rods

Spare tire



Off-road tires

INTRODUCTION

ABSTRACT UTILITY

Essay by Sara-Jayne Parsons, Director & Curator, The Art Galleries at TCU

In 1976 when Johnny Cash sang about building a car “one piece at a time” he wasn’t just referring to the lovingly-crafted psychobilly Cadillac that he was going to drive around town. In essence Cash was highlighting working-class resourcefulness and imagination; a type of practical ingenuity that comes from a position of desire and problem-solving. In kinship with this sensibility Buster Graybill presents *Abstract Utility*, a selection of gallery-based works and a new, mobile installation. The range of work showcases his artistic practice that examines and celebrates the rich cultural life of rural America, while considering geography and stories, collective lore and personal memories.

The core of Graybill’s curiosity rests with an interest in, and understanding of, leisure activity as a cultural connection or a common shared language of the rural. Fishing, hunting, auto-repair and backyard barbecuing are interrogated as creative practices, and under his gaze these activities are rendered through a fresh appreciation of

mundane or overlooked objects and materials. Graybill’s work often addresses a needs-must or can-do pragmatism, where resilience meets inspired solutions. The process of fixing, recycling or repurposing found objects, results in a studio practice that simultaneously engages with fine art concepts and everyday utility. Graybill seeks balance in his drive for formal elegance and practical efficacy.

Recreational Modernism is an ongoing series including sculptures and lawn chair strap “paintings” which address such concerns. Graybill explores Modernist tendencies from a rural, working-class perspective, and these works challenge perceived notions of value and hierarchies imposed on objects of “high” and “low” culture. They delight in the formal nuances and conceptual potential of objects and materials often associated with outdoor leisure. The strap paintings employ a minimal, woven arrangement of plastic webbing to create geometric shapes and orderly compositions. Here Graybill provokes an art historical conversation with hard-edge



R. MUTT: Renegade Modernist Utility Travel Trailer, 2019, on site at Fort Worth Contemporary Arts

painting and post-painterly abstraction found in the works of artists such as Frank Stella and Ellsworth Kelly.

However, not all references are so neatly aligned, and Graybill describes his works as feral, moving freely in the space between high art, folk art and popular culture. In *SHOOT* (2017) an automatic skeet thrower sits amidst the debris of over 200 broken, orange clay pigeons. The performance detritus is crunchy underfoot and extends throughout the gallery. The pockmarked gallery wall facing the thrower

displays a collection of faint orange lines at thigh-height, exposing the indexical trauma of close-range impact. And while the skeet thrower is inert, it gives the illusion of possibility. It may activate at any time. The Gallery smells of gunpowder and anticipation as *Jackass* meets Jackson Pollock. Graybill’s backyard dude-stunt results in an automatic wall drawing.

Critical observers might speculate that rural, working-class culture is crude and unsophisticated, and as such Graybill’s work reduces redneck aesthetics to a

palatable experience. Certainly in the intersectional culture of 2019 this is potentially tricky terrain. Graybill describes his position as “navigating the brackish water between contemporary art and engagement with rural activities, labor and materials.” He acknowledges his subject poses ideological challenges; he traverses a white, male-dominated landscape. But lived experience forms the basis of his approach. His work originates from a place of honesty and recognition, not defense or argument. Working as a contractor before he was an artist, Graybill had a host of blue-collar jobs over many years resulting in a wide-ranging skill-set but also a socio-political position that enables him to tread thoughtfully in this context. He frequently negotiates formal ideas with a sense of humor and self-deprecation, especially when objects are associated with class and gender.

In his most recent work, *R.MUTT: Renegade Modernist Utility Travel Trailer* (2019), Graybill's playful interests are somewhat superseded

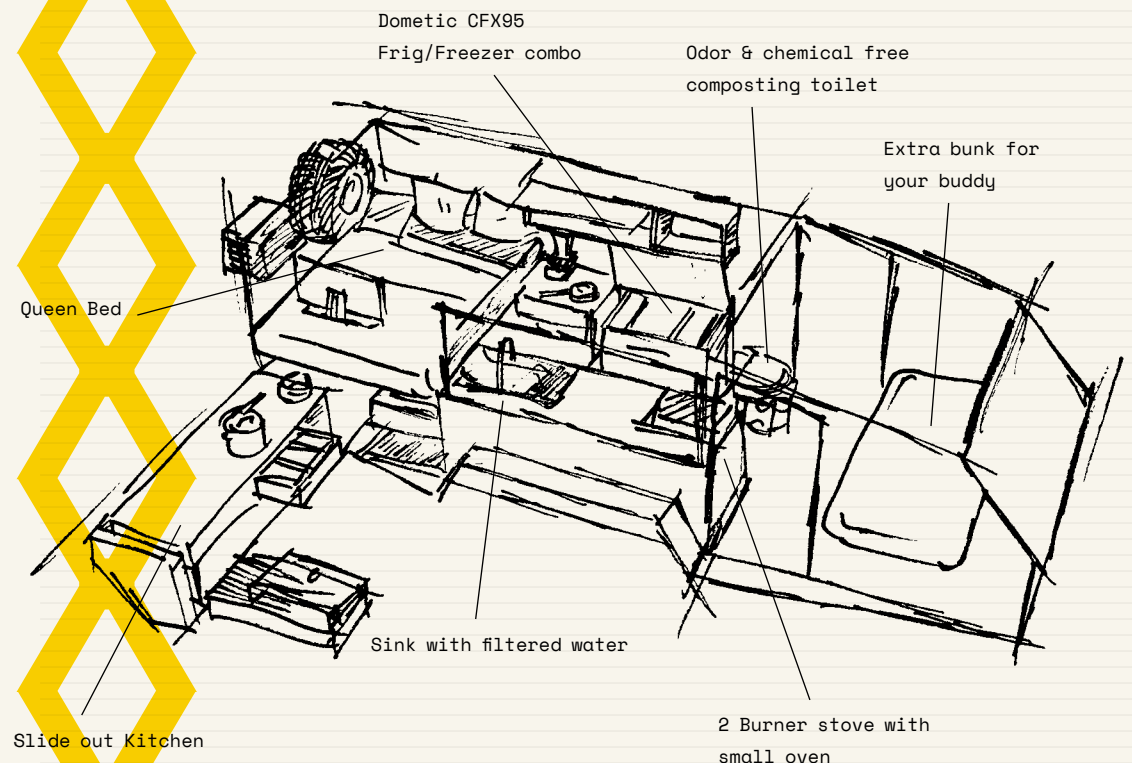
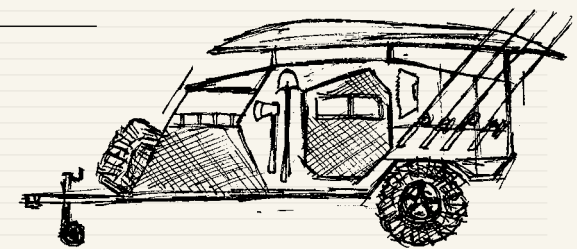
by a psychological uneasiness that reflects on working-class subsistence and points to graver concerns. What happens when practical skills and inventiveness can actually save your life and protect your family? How do you prepare for the collapse of social systems or civil infrastructure? What if adaptation means survival?

A Postmodern covered wagon, *R.MUTT* is a 20-foot, extreme, off-road camper trailer that is both Doomsday prepper's dream and Modernist sculpture; a means of survival where form and function coexist. Preparations for the end of time include sleeping quarters for 3-4 people; a slide-out field kitchen; a water collection and filtration system; a library of books on survival, bushcraft, homesteading and Postmodern art; and, a solar powered electrical system and refrigerator/freezer. Named in homage to Marcel Duchamp's urinal, Graybill's urban escape vehicle is custom-made in preparation for a variety of scenarios including economic and political failure, pandemics, deterioration in food production, natural catastrophes, nuclear

fallout and biological warfare. At present it functions in a temporary capacity, as a mobile art studio and base camp for Graybill's nomadic, self-guided art residencies. But when the world collapses it will become a permanent home.

Graybill's early ideas about the trailer developed in 2008-9, a period characterized by global recession and financial anxiety. At the time his neighbors, who were military personnel and survivalist enthusiasts, encouraged him to prepare for life off-grid. Their conversations circled various political, social and

moral concerns, from healthcare and migration, to affordable housing and the environment. The trailer began to encapsulate Graybill's collected response to what he perceived as escalating cultural tension, paranoia, political anxiety, and an obsessive fantasy with planning for the end of the world. Ultimately he asks, what will you survive? He's ready. Are you? That new world will need building, one piece at a time.



A MEANS OF SURVIVAL WHERE FORM AND FUNCTION COEXIST.

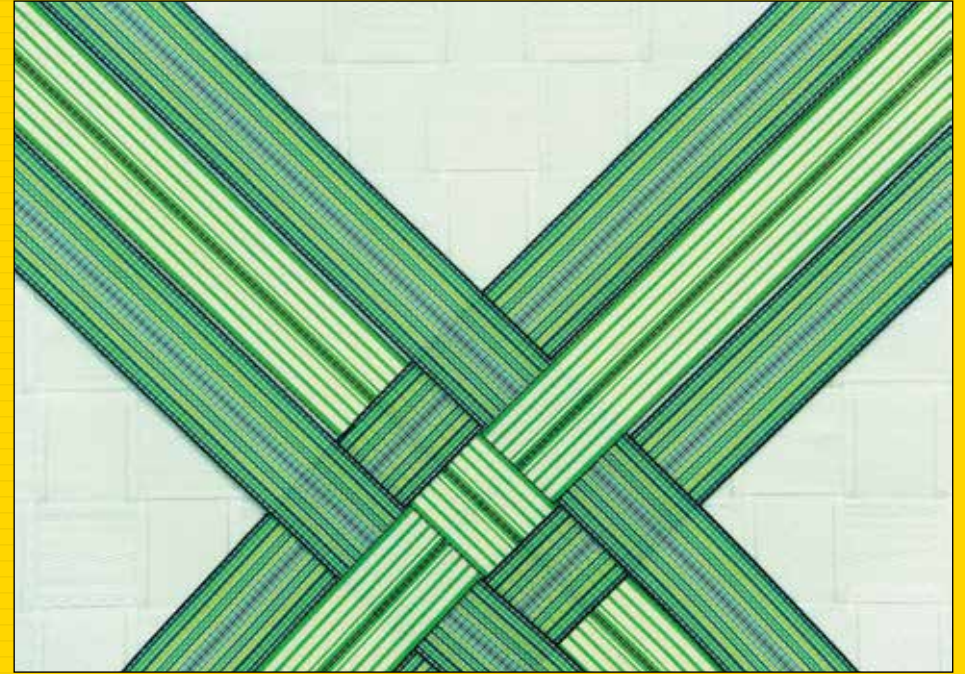


EXHIBITION

[01]



[02]



01. *Burden of the Beast*, 2016

Foam coated in Line-X Bed Liner, arrows, milk crates & ratchet strap

39 x 39 x 39 inches

02. *Composition 16*, 2018

Lawn chair webbing on wood panel

19 x 69 inches

03. *Upward Mobility*, 2019

Jack stands, milk crate, ratchet strap, tires & Artforum magazine

102 x 32 x 32 inches

[03]



[04]



04. *Exhausted*, 2017
Hooker Headers, Cherry
Bomb glasspack mufflers &
exhaust pipes
24ft x 6ft x 2ft

05. *Rip Tide*, 2016
Paddle, foam coated in Line-
X Bed Liner & fishing corks
30 x 30 x 88 inches

06. *Rip Tide*, detail, 2016
Paddle, foam coated in Line-
X Bed Liner & fishing corks
30 x 30 x 88 inches

07. *SHOOT*, 2017
Automatic skeet thrower &
230 busted clay pigeons
Dimensions variable

08. *SHOOT*, detail, 2017
Automatic skeet thrower &
230 busted clay pigeons
Dimensions variable



[08]



[05]



[06]

[07]



BUSTER GRAYBILL

ARTIST BIO

Buster Graybill is an Assistant Professor at the University of Texas at San Antonio in the Department of Art and Art History. He utilizes sculpture, installation, video and photography to traverse cultural boundaries and reconnect with often overlooked objects, materials and places found in the rural landscape.

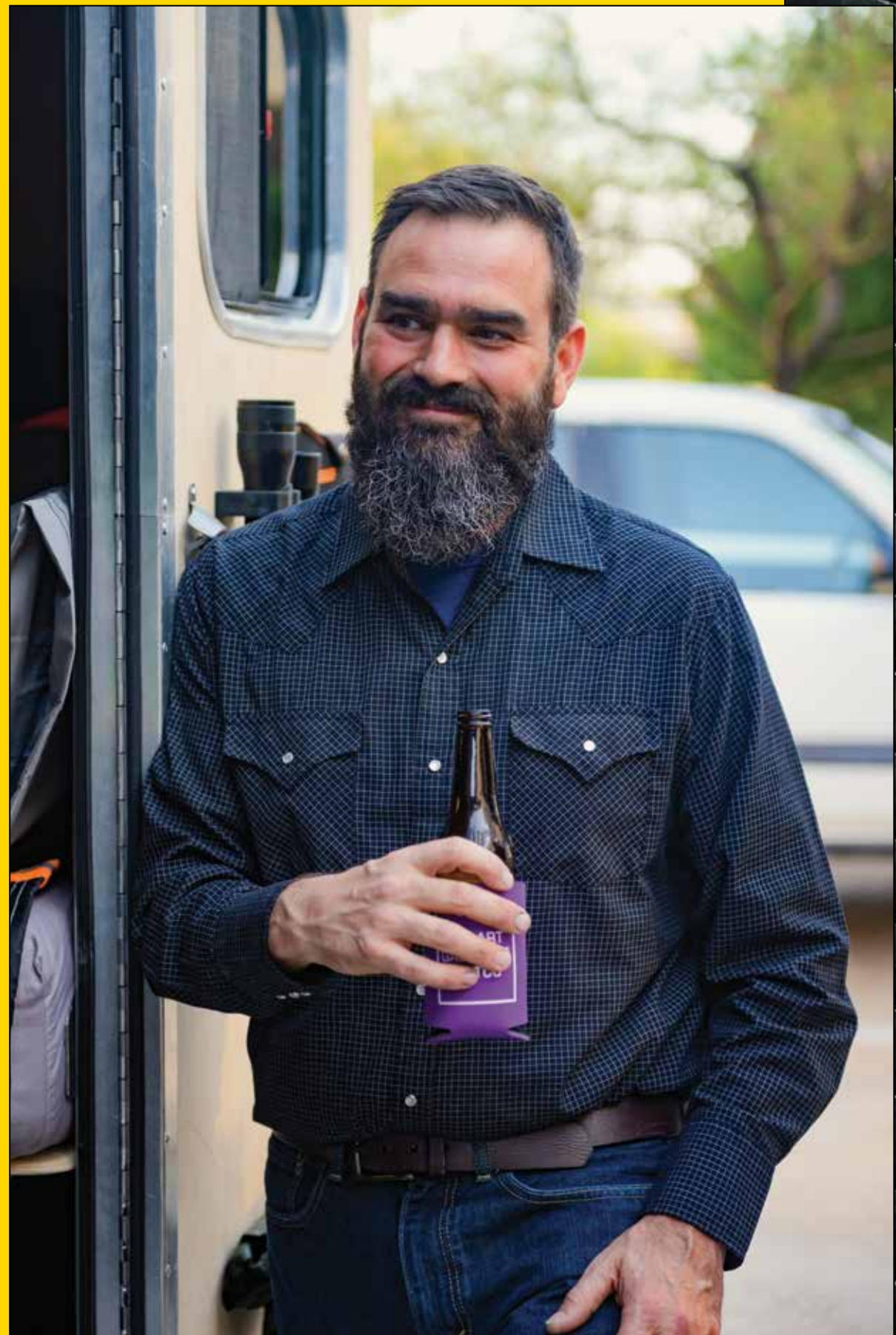
Graybill has exhibited widely throughout Texas, including his most recent solo exhibitions *Leisurely*, at Galveston Art Center (2018) and *Leisure Lines*, at the Southwest School of Art, San Antonio (2017).

He has also participated in solo and group exhibitions in Boston,

Miami, New York, Philadelphia, Salt Lake City and Guanajuato, Mexico. Graybill is an alumnus of the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture Residency and the Artpace International Artist-In-Residence program, as well as a recipient of grants from the San Antonio Artist Foundation and the Idea Fund, a program of the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts. In 2016 Glasstire listed him as one of the Top 10 artists in Texas.

Graybill received his BFA from the University of North Texas (2001) and an MFA from the University of Texas at Austin (2008). He lives and works in San Antonio.

bustergraybill.com



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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