

Title: Fool's Gold

Artist: Stephen Hobbs

WITH a penchant for creating ephemeral art Stephen Hobbs has made a habit of avoiding commercial gallery shows. It's not that he looks upon the commercial circuit with disdain – well, not completely – but rather that his interests in architecture and the politics of public space have prompted a natural inclination towards creating work and interventions that exist outside the gallery.

This exhibition, his first since he entered into a serious relationship with a commercial dealer, was obviously going to generate interest; how would he adapt to the constraints?

With his characteristic sense of cunning and humour, Hobbs has negotiated this new course with an exhibition centred on presenting small replicas of larger grand-scale works that could not be contained within a gallery space.

He has taken this idea one step further. Given that he will never make these works, he has allowed himself to dream not only beyond the gallery space but beyond financial and or other practical constraints.

For example, it is unlikely that Hobbs would be given the chance to alter the facades of the Empire State Building or the Chrysler building. But he does have free rein to enact his projects on miniature versions of these US landmarks.

He does this by presenting miniature models of these buildings which have been subject to the act of transformation.

In one rendition of the Empire State building he disrupts the characteristic silhouette of this edifice with a sheath and matchsticks and in the other he fashions a model of the building from Meccano pieces and matchsticks that are meant to evoke the wooden planks used as scaffolding.

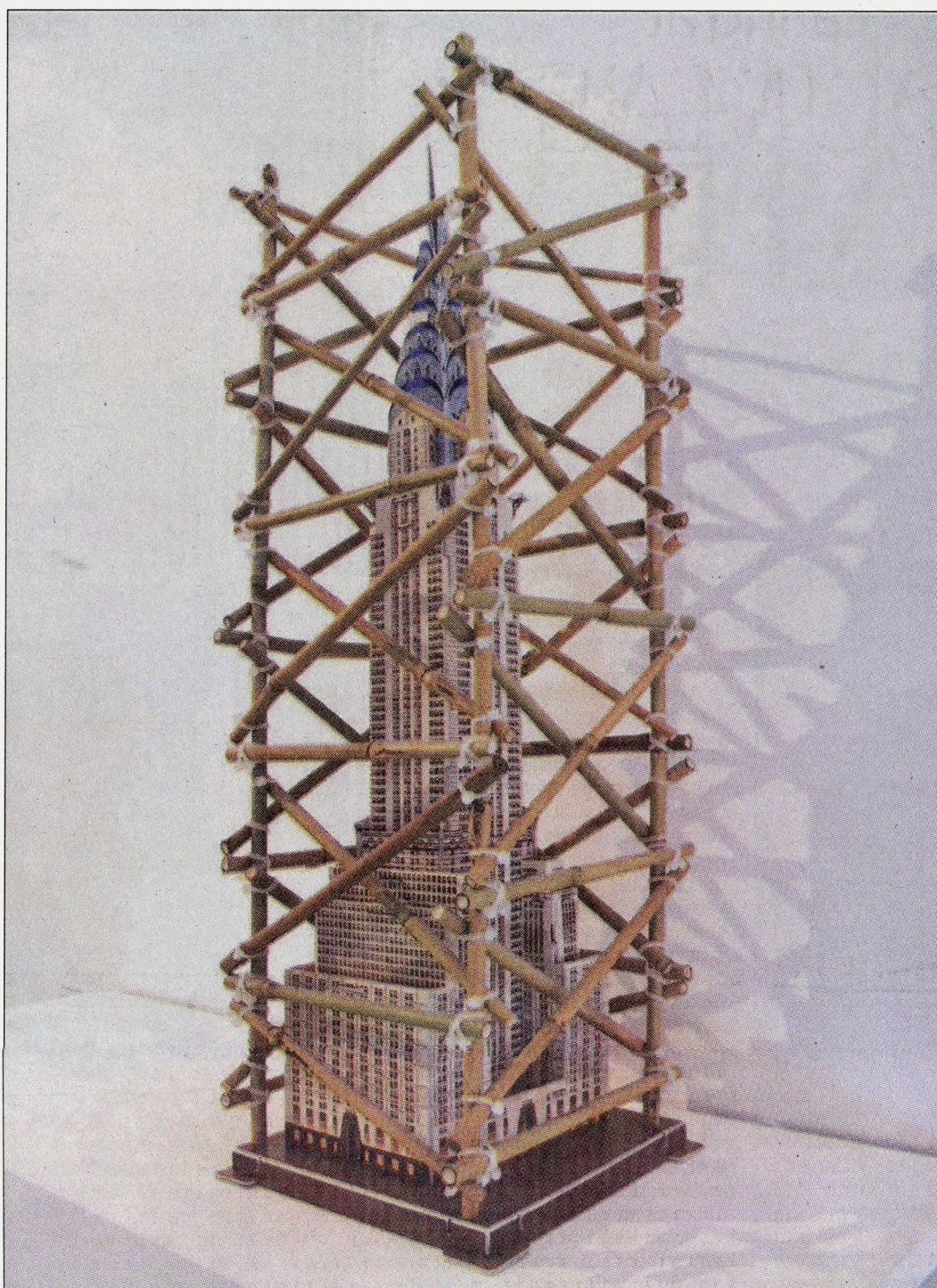
The "scaffolding" in the latter model, however, is contained within the building rather than outside it as is customary, implying that it is subject to constant internal change.

And it's not just physical change: the title, *State of Empire*, implies that physical disruptions mirror ideological shifts in national identity.

These models are not only products where an architect and artist's projected fantasies intersect and collide but as these kind of colourful stylised models are presumably collectors' items they also articulate ordinary people's desire to control and know these landmark buildings. Because of their extraordinary dimensions they are only partially tangible – one cannot perceive them from a single vantage point.

Hobbs, therefore, unpacks the function of miniatures and the act of miniaturising and how, on an abstract level, it plays a key role in negotiating national identity and visualising an urban utopia.

A key point that Hobbs makes is how our collective interest is focused on buildings and how this marginalises the importance of the spaces around them.



In *Takeover*, Hobbs 'remodels' the Chrysler building in New York

Beyond the gallery

This is particularly relevant to supposedly failed urban locales, where attention is shifted to these non-functioning non-spaces, for ultimately it is these non-spaces that define the experience of a city.

Buildings may establish the city's visual persona but it is in these no-man's-lands that the intangible essence of a place is manifested.

Given that these non-spaces are often just routes between places and buildings they are colonised by a transient public. This makes them highly dynamic and unpredictable and therefore almost impossible to map. Nevertheless the regeneration of a city and the sense in which it is seen to live up to a utopian ideal depends on this space being functional.

Hobbs gives expression to this non-space in three ways; first, in a photograph titled *Troubled City*, where he presents an aerial view of a city in which all the spaces between buildings have been erased.

Second, in a video artwork

documenting an idealistic urban space – the Point Road development in Durban – where this non-space is filled with water canals. In another work, photographs of hundreds of buildings are collaged on top of each other in such a way that the urban landscape between them has been obviated.

It's a claustrophobic scene as the buildings begin to meld into each other. They are mirror images of each other and thus form a distinctive pattern in which the core motif remains constant.

This establishes an endless sense of doubling; like looking into a mirror reflection of a mirror reflection. Hobbs props this collaged image on sticks, drawing attention to another kind of doubling in which the collaged images of structures becomes a structure in its own right. This obviously relates back to the notion of miniature models, which are also structures of structures.

An artwork titled *Fool's Gold*, which references the way

in which one lesser entity is used as a substitute for the real thing, is a textual map of Hobbs's plans for this exhibition. This drawing shows his ideas in their purest form – before they have been visualised.

Nevertheless Hobbs implies that the substitute structures – which are substitutes for real objects and ideas – are also greater than the authentic constructions that they mimic because it is only within the model that ideas and aspirations can flourish without any limitations.

Thus ironically and paradoxically Hobbs concludes that it is within the gallery space that his grandest artworks can be visualised – albeit that they will never actually exist.

● *Fool's Gold* runs at David Krut in Parkwood, Joburg, until September 25. *Fool's Gold* extended is showing at David Krut at Arts on Main. Hobbs will give a talk at the the Bioscope on Tuesday. Contact taryn@davidkrut.com to book a seat.



In *Empire State*, Hobbs meditates on the ideological character of buildings.

Stephen Hobbs dreams beyond the white cube, writes Mary Corrigan

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Sun: 9:05, 11:40, 14:25, 17:10, 19:50

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Mon-Sat: 9:45, 12:00, 14:45, 17:00, 20:00, 22:20

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Sun: 10:00, 12:15, 15:00, 17:45, 20:15

DORIAN GRAY

Mon-Sat: 9:30, 12:30, 15:00, 17:15, 19:30, 22:00

Sun: 9:30, 12:30, 15:00, 17:15, 19:30

VAMPIRES SUCK

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Sun: 9:30, 12:30, 15:00, 17:15, 19:30

THE SORCERER'S APPRENTICE

Mon-Sat: 9:10, 11:30, 14:15, 17:00, 19:30

Sun: 9:10, 11:30, 14:15, 17:00, 19:30

THE A-TEAM

Mon-Sat: 9:15, 12:15, 14:45, 17:45, 20:15, 22:50

Sun: 9:15, 12:15, 14:45, 17:45, 20:15

STEP UP 3

Fri, Sat: 9:15, 11:30, 14:15, 17:00, 19:30, 22:20

Sun: 9:15, 11:30, 14:15, 17:00, 19:30

GROWN UPS

Fri, Sat: 9:30, 11:45, 14:15, 17:00, 19:45, 22:45

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Tue: 9:45, 12:15, 15:00, 17:45, 20:15, 22:40

AGORA

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Tue: 9:10, 11:45, 14:25, 17:05, 19:45, 22:30

CHLOE

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Mon, Wed, Thu: 9:30, 12:00, 14:15, 17:00, 19:30

Tue: 9:30, 12:00, 14:15, 17:00, 19:30, 22:00

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PLEASE GIVE

Fri, Sat: 9:30, 11:30, 14:15, 17:15, 19:30, 22:00

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Tue: 9:30, 11:30, 14:15, 17:15, 19:30, 22:00

MAO'S LAST DANCER

Fri, Sat: 9:05, 11:45, 14:45, 17:15, 19:45, 22:15

Sun: 9:05, 11:45, 14:45, 17:15, 19:45

Mon, Wed, Thu: 9:05, 11:45, 14:45, 17:15, 19:45

Tue: 9:05, 11:45, 14:45, 17:15, 19:45, 22:15

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Mon, Wed, Thu: 10:00, 12:30, 15:15, 18:00, 20:30

Tue: 10:00, 12:30, 15:15, 18:00, 20:30, 22:40

Wed: 10:00, 15:15, 18:00, 20:30

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Sun: 10:15, 12:30, 15:15, 18:00, 20:15

Mon, Wed, Thu: 10:15, 12:30, 15:15, 18:00, 20:15

Tue: 10:15, 12:30, 15:15, 18:00, 20:15, 22:45

THE MAID

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Sun: 10:00, 12:15, 15:00, 17:45, 20:00

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