

Art in America

View of Arthur Simms's exhibition of sculptures and drawings from 1989-2005; at Five Myles.

Arthur Simms at Five Myles

Best known for his found-object sculptures reminiscent of the piles of belongings that homeless people often transport in carts, Arthur Simms recently mounted an exhibition of sculptures and drawings made between 1989 and 2005. Relying on precarious placement and balance, these works activate their quotidian materials through visual tension, rendering the mundane magical.

In *Crossroads, St. Andrews, Kingston, Jamaica, 1961-69* (1992), an imposing accumulation of old clothes, road signs, discarded metal and other detritus, tightly bound in twine, is built on a small wheeled platform that almost inconceivably holds up the mass. *Blue Chair* (2002), its small titular component wrapped in bright copper wire, is topped by a curved branch with a sharp knife attached to one end and a heavy stone to the other.

Simms, who calls himself a "constructivist" in the literal sense, sometimes joins collected leavings into conceptual portraits. Named for the artist's mother and father, *Icema and Chester* (1989-92) features burlap bags, scrap lumber and highway caution signs set within interlaced wood frames fastened together with knotted rope and reinforced with glue. The sculpture assumes a contrapposto stance, twisting on its vertical axis.

Other works are rife with cul-

tural references. *To Explain, Expound and Exhort, to See, Foresee and Prophecy, to the Few Who Could or Would Not Listen* (1995) is made in the shape of an Ethiopian cross. The nails piercing fabric and shoes affixed to the beams recall Nkisi sculptures from the Democratic Republic of Congo, where nails are driven into the works in rituals intended to cure illness. The drawings on view, produced when Simms won a Prix de Rome in 2002-03, juxtapose reminders of the African Diaspora—bits of African-American hair or images of iconic figures such as Frederick Douglass—with reproductions of works by historical European painters like Caravaggio.

Evoking the African-American saying "Where there's light, evil will not pass," Simms frequently uses reflective materials in his sculptures and rubs highlights into the charcoal of his drawings to suggest auras of light. Salvaging community discards, he transforms them into artworks that won't let you pass them by.

—Sarah Lewis