

**Chris Foster**

*Frontiers in Real Estate*





Although Chris Foster's *Frontiers in Real Estate* exhibit practically screams of dystopia, this is not some empty nihilistic condemnation of the contemporary socio-economic juggernaut. The entire collection radiates a note of hope wrapped in humour, as if to say that, if we cannot kill the beast, we can at least climb atop it and tweak its nose. The word "frontier" within the title echoes that message, counselling us to flee the mundane and raise the flag on our own dream state. In that respect, it is certainly appropriate that Foster's work should be displayed in the ODD Gallery, as there is something inherently Yukon-like in his art, with themes of escape and eccentricity combined with hints of the Third World contained within the First.

The overall exhibit itself has three components. Most conspicuous are miniature three-dimensional models, grouped together under the thematic title "Convoy," which marry toy vehicles with meticulously-crafted custom add-on dwellings. These tidy, tiny constructs are the antithesis to cookie-cutter mass-produced aluminum campers. Inspired by the freewheeling, rolling hippie homes of the 1970s, the attached model buildings resemble small chalets or cottages, complete with wooden shake roofs, all exquisitely detailed and screaming coziness.

The models symbolize personal autonomy through escape, but although there is a quirky, almost fairytale quality to the vehicle/dwellings, Foster's practical side shows through. He has worked as a builder, apprenticing to a Cape-Breton-born heritage carpenter doing restorations, and is steeped in the aesthetic tradition of post-Victorian East Coast working-class

architecture. In fact, he bills himself as "Artist + Problem Solver." Foster himself acknowledges the theoretical practicality of his detailed miniatures, but should he go through the time-consuming process of producing a new round of models, pledges to make the next generation more whimsical and far less sensible.

The second collection within Foster's overall exhibit is a series of silk-screened prints that depict an altogether different sort of dream home. The images show surreal dwellings, like multi-room treehouses for adults (or, perhaps, to a Yukoner, fire towers) perched high above the ground on scrupulously drafted mechanical frames, and clearly affording a spectacular 360° view. Some prints include secondary outbuildings, also elevated, all suggesting a new civilization carved out of the wilderness. Yet, while these aerial abodes are separated from their environments, they are also still intrinsically integrated into them, as if dropping out and dropping in are different sides of the same panoramic puzzle. There is also an almost post-apocalyptic loneliness to the scenes. The building in one print is set among the remains of a burned forest, while another sits astride a stone rubble field reminiscent of our local dredge tailings.

This form of hand-cut printmaking is a favourite medium of Foster's, and one he aims to pursue more for future works. He starts with sketches, then utilizes a five-tone process, and still manually cuts each individual colour separation using a light table, before scanning and integrating them into the final screen for print.

The third and final part of Foster's exhibition, entitled "New Civilizations," is arguably the darkest. The mounted images are comprised of collages of black and white photographs, mostly taken from the pages of National Geographic. In an age of rampant Photoshopping, the artist has chosen to cut and paste these collages manually, which, as one reviewer wrote, "speaks to Foster's honesty of process and material." The resulting images have painstakingly matched perspective lines, so that they easily fool the eye as they are recomposed into new, improbable, and somewhat disturbing scenes. In so doing, they meld past, present, and future. Ultimately, through the construction, repurposing, and juxtaposition of historical imagery, the collages are intended to weave an entirely new narrative.

Foster's past work has shown a similar social consciousness, touching on the nature — and ultimate cost — of progress. Having just moved to Toronto after a decade in Nova Scotia, he already has plans to exploit the urban and suburban environments for his future art, even if his heart remains on the East Coast.

There is an angst to Foster's artwork, and it is clear he has profound concerns about the state of the world around him, especially the rampant consumerism in today's society. But while escapism may be the thematic underpinning for his exhibit, he is not counselling us to abandon our ideals or shirk responsibility. His creations are ultimately meant to build a dialogue, and to cause us to reflect. The frontier he is pointing us towards likely resides within each and every one of us.

Dan Dowhal, 2013

*Dan Dowhal is a Yukon-based writer, producer, and educator. He is originally from Toronto, where he received a journalism degree from Ryerson University. A former Berton House Writer-in-Residence, he now makes his home in Dawson City.*

Image Credits:  
front: Foster, detail, *Comtower 2*, screen print, 2012  
facing page: Foster, *Chevy Van*, mixed media, 2012 (photo by Devon Crosby)  
back: Foster, from *New Civilizations*, collage, 2011



# Chris Foster

## Frontiers in Real Estate

November 14 - December 13, 2013

### ARTIST STATEMENT

FRONTIERS IN REAL ESTATE is a travelling exhibition that Chris Foster has been developing since 2011. This body of work is comprised of to-scale model sculptures and serigraph prints developed as a highly portable travelling exhibition and the works pack into small crates and shipped via Canada Post.

The works in *Frontiers in Real Estate* suggest themes of escapism, scarcity and resourcefulness. The six sculptures are built from scale model vehicles that have been altered and combined with traditional wooden dwellings, complete with shingling and architectural embellishments common to houses found in Eastern Canada. The prints depict imagined makeshift dwellings set into remote Northern landscapes, industrial ruins and tall telecommunications towers.

**CHRIS FOSTER** is an interdisciplinary artist working in illustration, sculpture and print. His work employs a dark sense of humour to navigate feelings of optimism and hopelessness in contemporary life. His work celebrates Do-It-Yourself resourcefulness while challenging popular notions of progress in Western culture. His creative process is motivated by production-based projects, multiples and editions. He finds his aesthetic cues in old books, everyday vernacular and obsolete technology.

Foster attained an interdisciplinary BFA from the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD) in 2008. Since then, he has exhibited his work in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Ontario. His broader creative practice has included work with several artist-run projects in Halifax. He co-produced a publication called *The Periodical Project*; a free quarterly newspaper promoting Halifax based Artists. He was the Chair of Programming for the Khyber Centre for the Arts from 2011 - 2013 and a founding member of the Last Chance Studio, a shared studio complex in Halifax's North End. He is the festival co-ordinator for the White Rabbit Open Air Art Project, a month long Artist Residency program that takes place in Upper Economy, NS each year in August. After a decade of living in Halifax, Chris recently moved to Toronto to explore the side streets and back alleys in search of new friends and collaborators.



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