

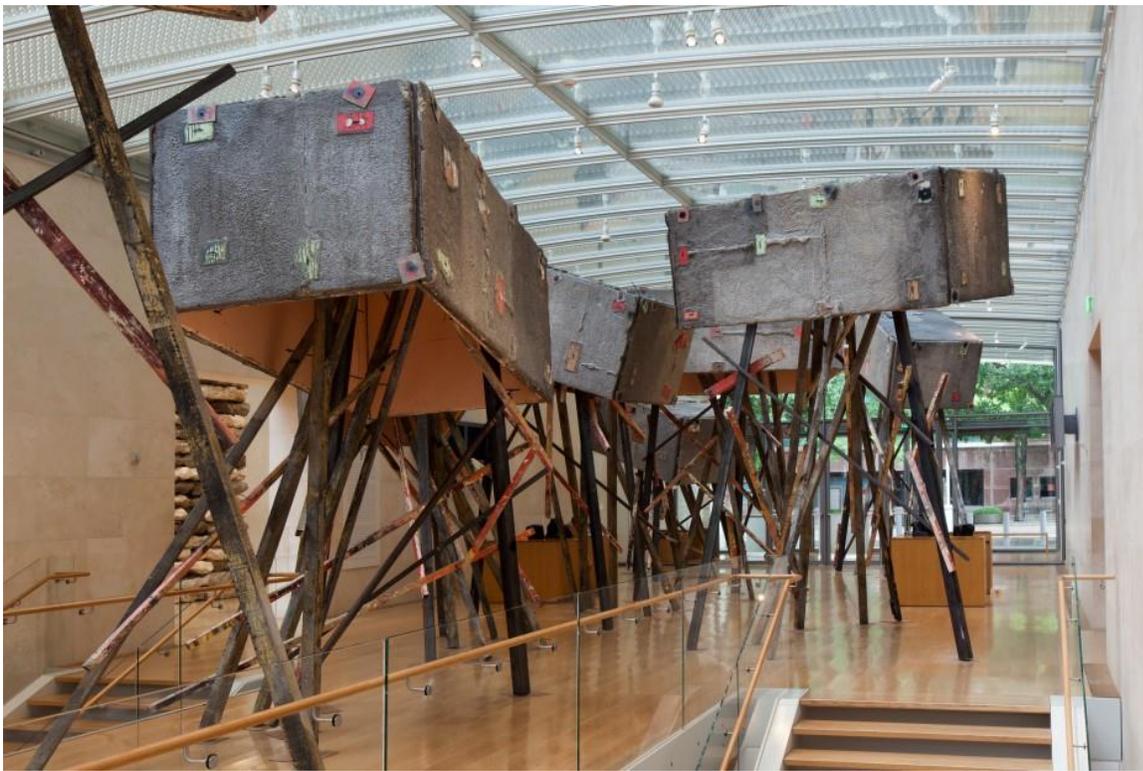
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Basking in Barlow at the Nasher Sculpture Center

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Photography Kevin Todora The artist's "Untitled:stiltedcrates2015", 2015, commands attention at the museum entrance.

Because British artist [Phyllida Barlow](#) is gentle and genuinely affable, her formidable, robust work comes as a bit of a shocker. On view now at the [Nasher Sculpture Center](#) is an exhibition refreshingly lacking in irony, which operates as a piled confection of metaphorical landscapes. Instead of underscoring what we lack, the artist offers a solidly tactile compilation of rock towers, tossed tires (tyres) and seemingly every form of the interrelation of media providing a vector into psychological resonance.

Barlow gives us back to ourselves via outward manifestations of our tangled interior emotions. Her work resonates with a range of diverse feelings, including abandonment, isolation, elation and even a floating

brand of extravagance — displayed in *100 Banners* — so charismatic that it requires a counterbalance of bright orange ballast to keep it existentially tethered.

Barlow's art is wrapped, nailed, draped, sewn and wildly rigged. And, as the show's name ("[Tryst](#)") suggests, the work urges us to consider how things mingle and coalesce, both in the exterior world and in our psyches. Thus, she isn't shy about deploying the term "phenomenology," which can be used as shorthand for an anti-Cartesian approach to apprehending things, including art, that is independent of a rigid brand of subjectivity. In other words, phenomenology allows and even celebrates an emotional response to both the world and artwork. It's an easy segue to suggest that her works are freighted with a psychological heft that is figuratively layered, not to mention splendidly tactile. These sculptures are either vaguely dystopian or buoyant, and while the exhibition's name suggests an afternoon idyll, the thrill of the show is its insinuation of a cosmic world that is simultaneously derelict and redeemed.

Stockade is one example. On the one hand, it's a sprawled array of soggy gray loops that seemingly constitutes an anti-epiphany; it's distinctly post-lapsarian, and where we've fallen is anyone's guess. It's a place of graceless loss and disaffection. Moreover, this new locale offers no vertical axis; instead, it's a horizontal plane of ashen and inscrutable import. However, its other section, the other part of the "stockade," is brilliantly painted and functions as an upbeat and upright counterpoint to the aforementioned sprawled and stony ground of disquieting terrain.

Adjacent to *Stockade* is *Hanging Monument*, a piece that, according to Barlow, invokes Milton's Satan in *Paradise Lost*. Leave it to someone not residing on American turf to effortlessly offer such a loaded allusion.

The sculptor's story is as follows: She was traveling in Texas oil fields and saw a herd of nodding donkeys [pumpjacks] covered in muck and oil. She memorialized the event with a cantilevered horizontal piece that is "rigged" and large, which reminds us of nether regions and hubris and this maxim. Inspired, Barlow shared a quote uttered by John Milton's poetic Lucifer character: "Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven." It's all very, very moving. Not to mention current.

Barlow again shows us ourselves by gently alluding to the flipside of Texas swagger and an outsized sensibility. But she does so deftly and intelligently. It's not a platitude, and it's light years from any New Age sensibility. Instead, her sculpture and installations are serious and deep, with smacks of archetypal lodes and the mesmerizing contours of consciousness. This work is big; it's also bold. And it's decidedly brilliant. "*Phyllida Barlow: Tryst*," at the *Nasher Sculpture Center*, through August 30, 2015.

All works of art courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth.



Barlow's "Untitled:stockade2015," 2015, looking toward the Nasher's garden.



Barlow's exuberant "Untitled:100banners2015," 2015, holds court downstairs at the Nasher.



Left to right: the sculptor's "Untitled:holder2015," and "Untitled:stockade2015," both 2015, create an intriguing dialogue with the Nasher's polished Renzo Piano interiors.



Phyllida Barlow's *Untitled:100banners2015*, 2015, at Nasher Sculpture Center, exemplifies the artist's use of unorthodox materials — in this case, lumber, plywood, tape, wadding, fabric, paint, sand and plastic.