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Critic's Pick: Phyllida Barlow

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Phyllida Barlow, *Untitled:stiltedcrates2015*,lumber, polyurethane foam, polystyrene, cement, steel, plywood, plastic fastenings, paint, hardboard, PVA adhesive, dimensions variable.

While once thought unusual, sculpture constructed from unpretentious, everyday objects is now deeply familiar to art viewers. Sarah Sze, [Jessica Stockholder](#), and [Thomas Hirschhorn](#) are just some of the recognizable names of this ubiquitous genre. [Phyllida Barlow](#), as senior stateswoman, belongs at the head of this list. In her playful installation at the Nasher Sculpture Center, Barlow describes her approach as being analogous to a ship in a bottle—the proverbial bottle in this case being [Renzo Piano](#)'s graciously elegant architecture. Yet unlike a delicate model ship encased in glass, Barlow's sculptural interventions prove unruly, with their raucous and unwieldy forms that demarcate the constraints of the light-filled space.

For the series “Untitled:stiltedcrates2015,” Barlow has constructed polyurethane foam and polystyrene-encased container boxes held aloft with wood and steel to create abstract, animal-like edifices that suggest nonsensical building construction sites. With the works gathered at the entrance, one is forced to walk under these heavy and seemingly precarious structures in order to enter the larger space of the

exhibition. Highlighting a basic property of large-scale sculpture, this work uses its imposing presence to create a powerful link between person, object, and building. In the most dramatic work of the show, taxonomically named *Untitled:100banners2015*, the artist deploys a forest of flags or quasi-protest banners lacking slogans in the single downstairs room. As one descends the wide staircase, a coppice of cheap lumber that's paint splattered and held upright by sandbags raises contrasting colored fabric and beckons one to enter, or perhaps threatens with riot and complaint.