

He relies on the same spontaneous, intuitive approach to create his sculpture, throwing himself into an intensely physical process he describes as a “caveman” way to manipulate the wood. He made all the sculpture in the installation on-site in a three-week period. Passersby watched him take full swings with a long handled axe, stripping the bark from massive logs. Trees cut down to make way for Rice University’s construction projects became subject to Charlie’s machete, mallet, and even his hands and feet, as he split them into jagged and splintered shards that form his characters.

At the center of Roberts’s cabinet, a human head emerges from between a woman’s legs; perhaps it is Mother Nature giving birth to the cosmos. Roberts says, “We don’t know why it goes on, but it goes on. There’s a tendency to think that our time or ourselves are exceptional, but we’re just specks in the grander push.”



ABOUT THE ARTIST

Charlie Roberts was born in Hutchinson, Kansas in 1983. He started making art in high school when he and his friends made posters to promote their band. Not until he took an art class from an especially influential high school art teacher did he become, as he puts it, “obsessed” with painting. Still, art did not seem like a realistic option to him, so he entered the University of Kansas as a history major. There he heard an art history professor tell such vivid stories about visual artists and their work that he committed himself to art, left the University of Kansas, and enrolled at the Emily Carr Institute of Art + Design in Vancouver, British Columbia, where he studied painting for two years. Roberts lives and works in Asker, Norway.

SUPPORT AND SPONSORSHIP

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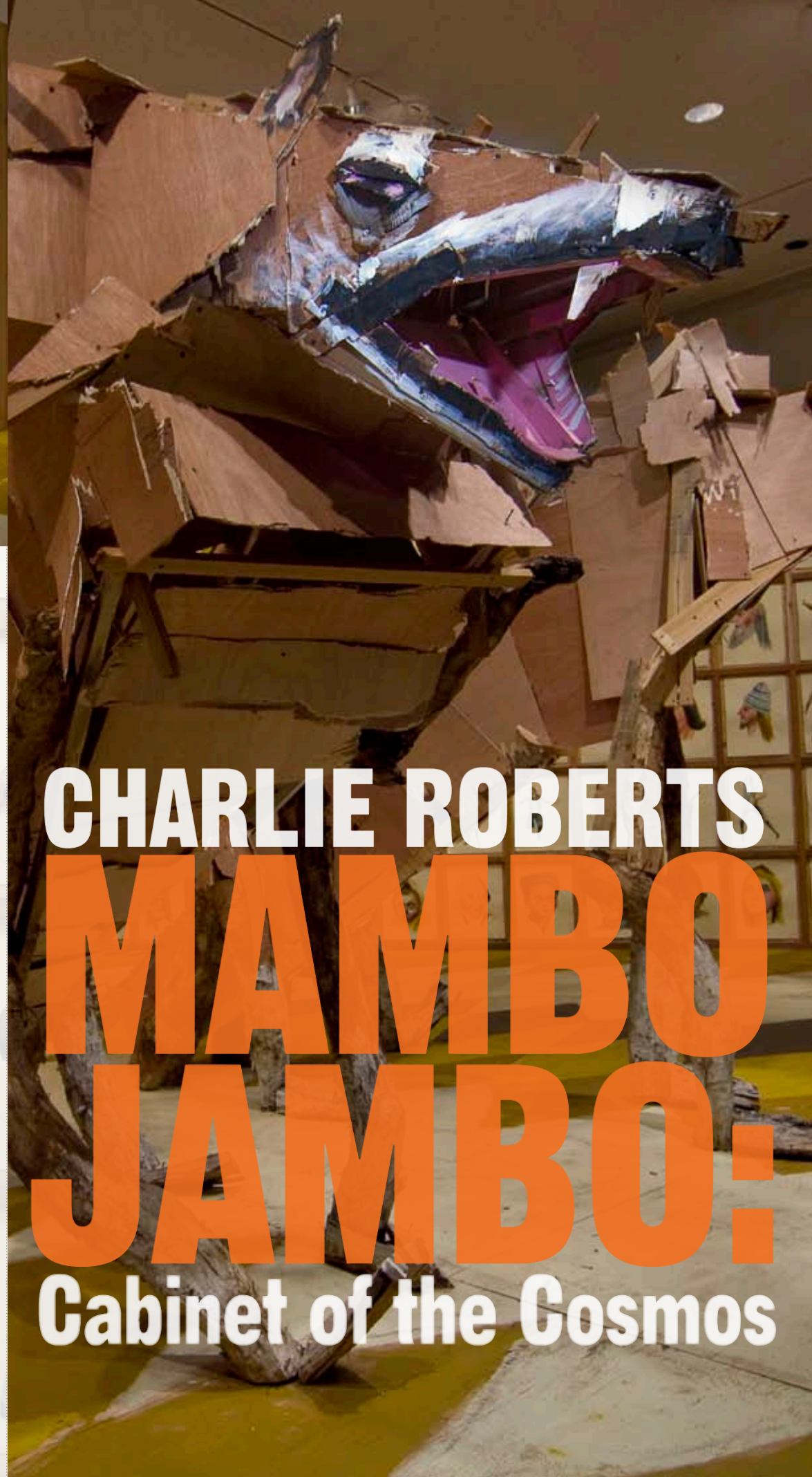
HOURS

Tuesday - Saturday, 11:00 - 5:00 pm
Thursday, 11:00 - 7:00 pm
Sunday, Noon - 5:00 pm
Closed Mondays and university holidays
Rice Gallery will be closed on Easter Sunday, 23 March.

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Rice Gallery



CHARLIE ROBERTS MAMBO JAMBO: Cabinet of the Cosmos

Charlie Roberts
MAMBO JAMBO: Cabinet of the Cosmos
24 January – 30 March

MAMBO JAMBO: Cabinet of the Cosmos, Charlie Roberts's new installation for Rice Gallery, showcases Roberts's exceptional talent as a painter and sculptor as well as his raw and exuberant vision. He associates the phrase "mambo jambo" with his music – his bluegrass band refers to playing music as "jambo" – with voodoo, and with gumbo, where everything is thrown into a single pot. In *MAMBO JAMBO: Cabinet of the Cosmos*, elements representing the animal and human worlds are united as one in a colossal wooden cabinet that encompasses the gallery walls. Brimming with paintings and sculptures, the cabinet is a take off on "cabinets of curiosities," created throughout Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries. These *Wunderkammern* (cabinets of wonder) were shrine-like repositories in which people displayed their art collections and remarkable souvenirs of the natural world. Roberts, in his own words, "loves to pack things to the gills," and the cabinet allows him, he says, "to fit many stories and objects into a small area." Its symmetrical form and use of images in paneled grids also borrows from the composition of medieval altarpieces. Roberts is especially interested in how altarpieces had side panels painted with deliberately muted images, which could be closed to hide the more radiant painting inside. As Roberts explains, "You'd have Adam and

Eve in black and white and then you'd open the altarpiece up and see the glories of heaven in color . . . the worldly grey and then, boom!"

Roberts completed the watercolor paintings on paper that fill the cabinet's side panels at his home in Norway. On the left side, birds, rodents, wild cats, and wolves, among many others, are each captured in a few deft strokes, while on the right, human faces peer out or are captured in freeze-frame motion. Roberts works with images he collects from the Internet, books, and magazines. Flipping through images as quickly as possible, he selects whatever strikes him.

