

# *We Place Our Ideas / Our Ideas Place Us*

## **Kelly Goff**

*Crates, 2014*

My childhood home on the island of Curaçao stood within a mile of three landmarks that have influenced me profoundly. The endless and transparent Caribbean Sea, the largest drydock in the Caribbean, and a massive petroleum refinery. The juxtaposition of human industry within the natural world was palpable to me even as a child. The colorful stacks of containers in the drydock and parade of freightliners being fueled and repaired were beautiful yet menacing. I could smell the pollution from my house. I escaped to the ocean to swim and snorkel. I'd stare at the horizon and sometimes I'd spot a disappearing container ship. I never fathomed the vast network of ships crossing paths out there or how those vessels and the goods they carried are driven by and produced with oil, some of it refined in my backyard in a process that threatened my ocean.

As an adult, I've devoted much of my sculptural practice to decoding these contrasts, like that beautiful ocean and the greasy film floating on its surface in our harbor. I do this by studying and manipulating specific objects. The freight container for instance is like my spirit animal. It is omnipresent in my homeland and as a symbolic object, it embodies the breadth of my conceptual and visual interests. I have questions about entropy, waste, and the evolving role of petroleum in our global economy, which affected me as a child in my industrial Curaçao, which I now seek to understand more clearly.

*Crates, 2014*

Recently my focus on specific objects has extended to include the vernacular of their locations. In the summer of 2014, I embedded myself in the Alaskan wilderness for a six-week artist residency 180 miles removed from the nearest road. I discovered there a place of obvious dualities (like Curaçao) where the majestic environment is permeated with the presence of oil, from offshore rigs that fleck the landscape to the myriad of fuel types needed to power the off-grid residency and the tools I used, to the resources required to extract the sculpture I made on site. From this tension, I conceived of and produced a project about shipping. Using rudimentary technologies, I felled and processed dead standing trees by hand. I produced rough boards with a

hand held chainsaw mill and used the wood to construct a series of large shipping crates. The crates are empty, except for themselves, nesting within each other like matryoshka for transport which was accomplished via fishing boat across a lake, multiple single-engined plane trips, a jumbo jet, and then UPS trucks across the country for exhibition. During this remote residency and production of *Crates*, 2014, I recorded audio samples. After the residency, I collaborated with the composer Ben Wasserman to produce an accompanying musical work entitled *Passage*, 2014, which loosely tells a story of remoteness, construction, and journey.

