

Cherry and Martin

Watson, Denise. "Norfolk native Brian Bress brings his video-based work back home to the Chrysler Museum of Art," *The Virginian Pilot*, September 13, 2016.

The Virginian-Pilot

When Brian Bress was a child, it was his job at his parents' pawn shop on Granby Street to take the flashy guitars and faded emerald cocktail rings to be cleaned. He had no idea how the years of handling the discarded pieces would shape him.

"At that time, you don't realize how things are going to affect you, but I found myself drawn to found objects," said Bress, now a Los Angeles-based artist and filmmaker. "I think it was the attraction to an object that had a previous history, the narrative that came with it."

Bress's latest piece has its own story, and he will unveil it Thursday at the Chrysler Museum of Art. Bress creates "monitor-based work," in which he makes sculptural forms that come to life through performance (sometimes Bress is in the costumes), and he films and loops the video on high-definition monitors that hang on walls like paintings. The monitors are often framed. Another of his pieces, "WOWMOM," is already on display.

Bress still considers himself a painter, though. "I realized that paintings were OK, but when I put found items in front of the paintings in my studio, it became more about these elaborate sets that I was building," he said. "The more beautiful and involved the space is, the more interesting they became." His featured piece for the Chrysler is called "Man With a Cigarette" and will take four screens to show his first full-scale human figure.

Bress's inspiration for the piece came from two sources. He was at an art residency in upstate New York in 2012 when he went into a thrift store and saw an eye-catching pen-and-ink drawing behind the counter. It depicted a man in a hat and tie, wearing a jacket with wide lapels. The cashier told him it wasn't for sale; the people at the store liked it too much to sell it. "It was beautiful and awkward. It was drawn in a way I used to draw in high school," said Bress, who graduated from Norfolk Collegiate in 1993. "It had pointillism, sketch. It seemed like a love letter to drawing, someone's attempt to express how much they loved drawing." Bress took a photo of it and told himself he'd do something with it one day.

Two years later, he was in an airport and noticed a video wall outside an apparel store. Female models were walking and posing on the runway, but the monitors were out of sync. He thought it looked brilliant. Then the Chrysler approached him about doing an installation piece.

He had an exhibition last year at Work I Release, but the invitation from the Chrysler tugged at some memories. He liked the idea of doing high-tech work at the Italianate-styled museum he'd grown up around. He'd also met Walter P. Chrysler Jr. years ago when Bress was a kid selling raffle tickets. "I'm a sucker for nostalgia, and this seemed the perfect opportunity to exercise all of those ideas." With a video wall at the Chrysler, he will bring his pen-and-ink man to life.

The Chrysler isn't the only one who has sought out Bress. The British pop duo Pet Shop Boys saw his work at a gallery and hired him to do its 2012 video "Invisible." Last year, he was asked to make a 9-foot-tall dress for the singer Sia, who performed inside the dress on the "Ellen" show.

He was nervous when he started experimenting with the monitor-based work, he said, but part of being an artist is exploring new worlds. His first show sold out. "When you're sort of experimenting and trying something new, you think, 'Did I just do something bad or do something good?'" he said. "That sense of insecurity is good."