



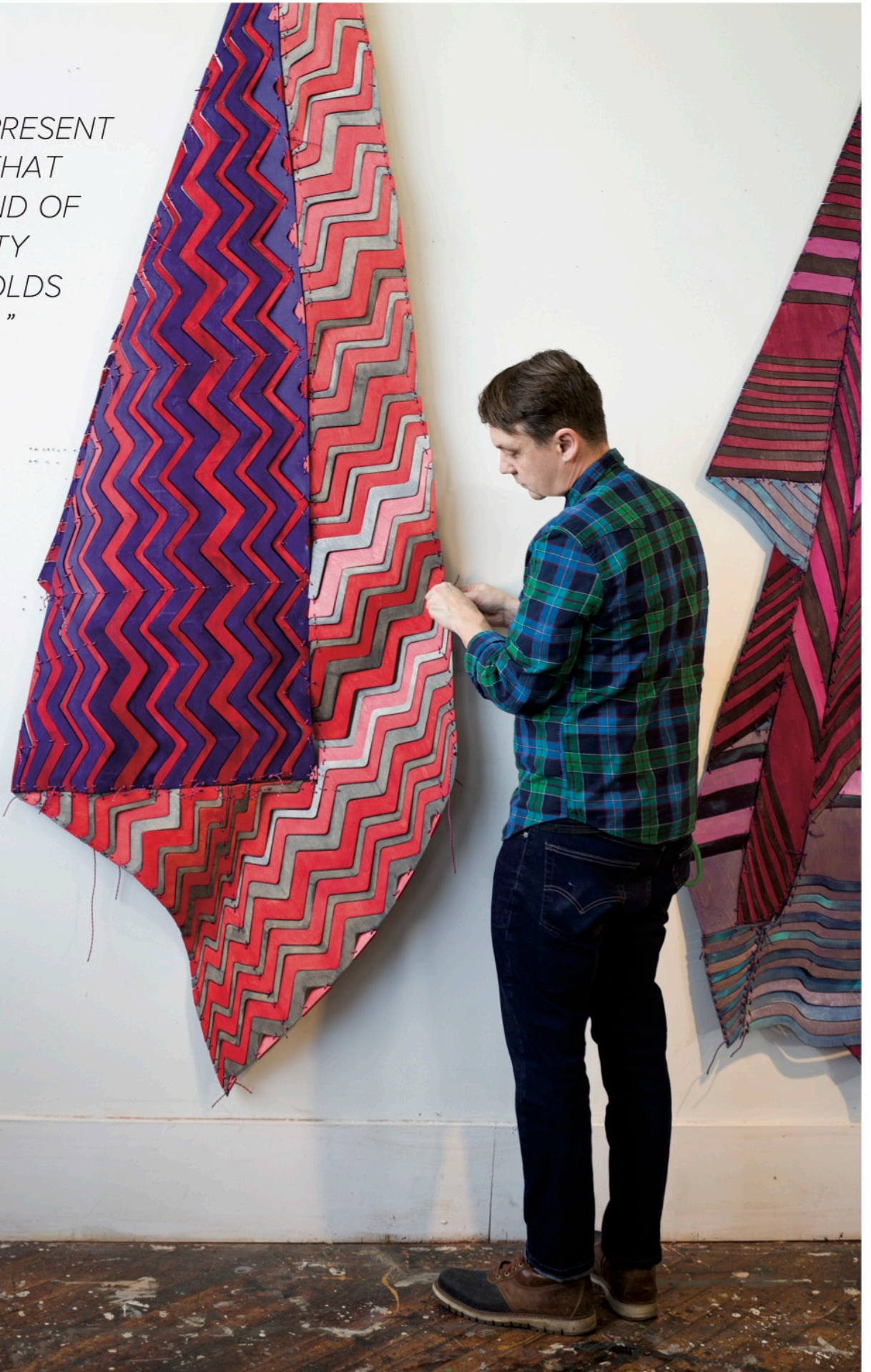
PUZZLE PIECES

ARTIST DAN GUNN'S VIBRANT, LARGE-
SCALE PLYWOOD WORKS PLAY WITH THE
PERCEPTION OF THEIR VIEWERS.

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Dan Gunn has a thing for the circus. And that affinity could not be more apparent than in his art, a showcase of large-scale works that appear to be immense swaths of hung fabric (think a huge circus tent, as well as aprons, tablecloths and quilts). But there's a touch of trickery behind them: They are, in fact, lacquered plywood.

That *trompe l'oeil* effect stems from Gunn's days working as a set builder. "With a theater set, you're building a three-dimensional picture made up of different parts that are incredibly unconvincing up close," he explains. "But then you combine them all, like a puzzle, and they become convincing once the stage lights are on and the actors are whizzing about. There was something about that kind of picture that was incredibly appealing; how it could be a prop for the imagination."

Gunn pondered how he could create something that was both an image and an object. Over the years, he had amassed a collection of fabrics, arranging them in various formations on the wall and initially recreating those formations using Plexiglas; he subsequently graduated to using plywood while simultaneously refining the process. Gunn arranges the drapery in the studio, photographs it and then manipulates it using Adobe Photoshop or Illustrator. "If I'm hand-cutting the form, I'll project the image directly onto the wood, trace it and cut it out," he explains. "If I'm using a CNC router, I convert it into vector shapes in Illustrator, which the router uses as a template when it cuts out the pieces." Gunn then stains the pieces and laces them together with small-gauge rope.

Many of Gunn's material choices are influenced by his Midwestern upbringing. "I'm from Kansas City originally, so the materials I've chosen play on some craft tropes," he explains. "Obviously, plywood is an industrial 1960s-and-after kind of material, but it still has this character of being almost a picture of wood grain. It's a nod to Midwestern craft tradition." That maker influence is also evident in his eye for bright colors, which stems in part from watching his quilter grandmother work wonders with fabric scraps.

What's inherent is the impishness of it all, he says. "I think there's something a bit silly about remaking a fabric out of wood. It's a bit absurd." That playfulness keeps Gunn from being chained to one style or medium. Case in point: his stoneware frogs, into which he drills holes and inserts marbles, creating a fairy tale-esque idea of the amphibian with multiple eyes. "There's something about the imagery that seemed surreal," he muses.

Gunn's hope is that his works will stay with people long after they've viewed them. "I like to present objects that have a kind of complexity that unfolds over time," he says. "And I don't want that encounter to be totally reducible to a single emotion, but one in which the viewer feels a realm of emotions and hopefully that realm is a complex one." ■

In his studio, artist Dan Gunn (opposite) works on his piece *Ringer Scenery*. Gunn's process for the "Scenery" series begins with color studies and material tests (above). While much of his work involves plywood (top, left), he also created a whimsical series of stoneware frogs, which includes *The Ungrateful Son, No.11* (top, right).