

STEVE TOBIN MIND OVER MATTER

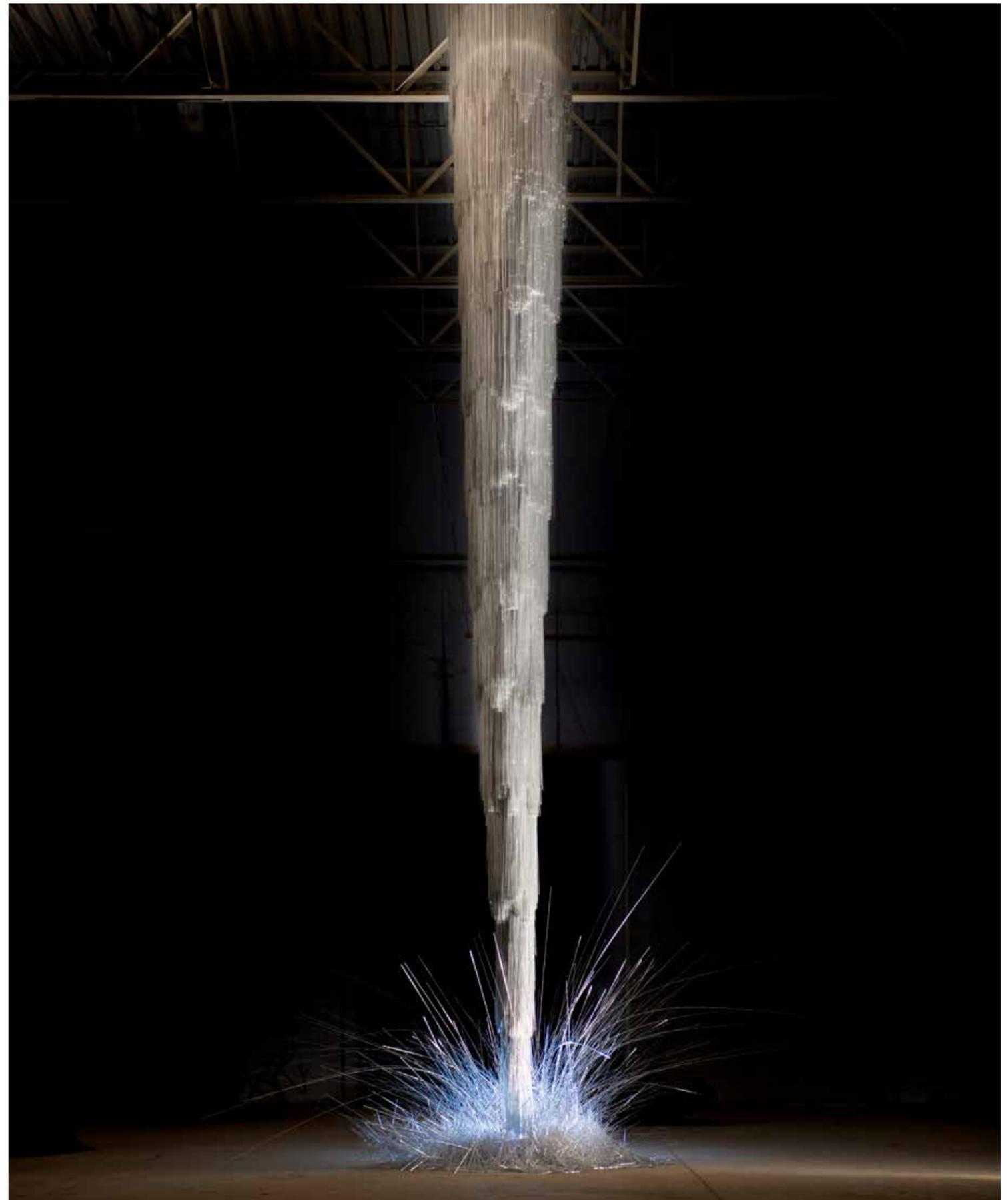
STEELWATERS, 2017

Metal rods  
29 × 10 × 10 ft.

FOLLOWING PAGE

ROOTS, 2007

Sumi ink on rice paper  
9½ × 12 in.

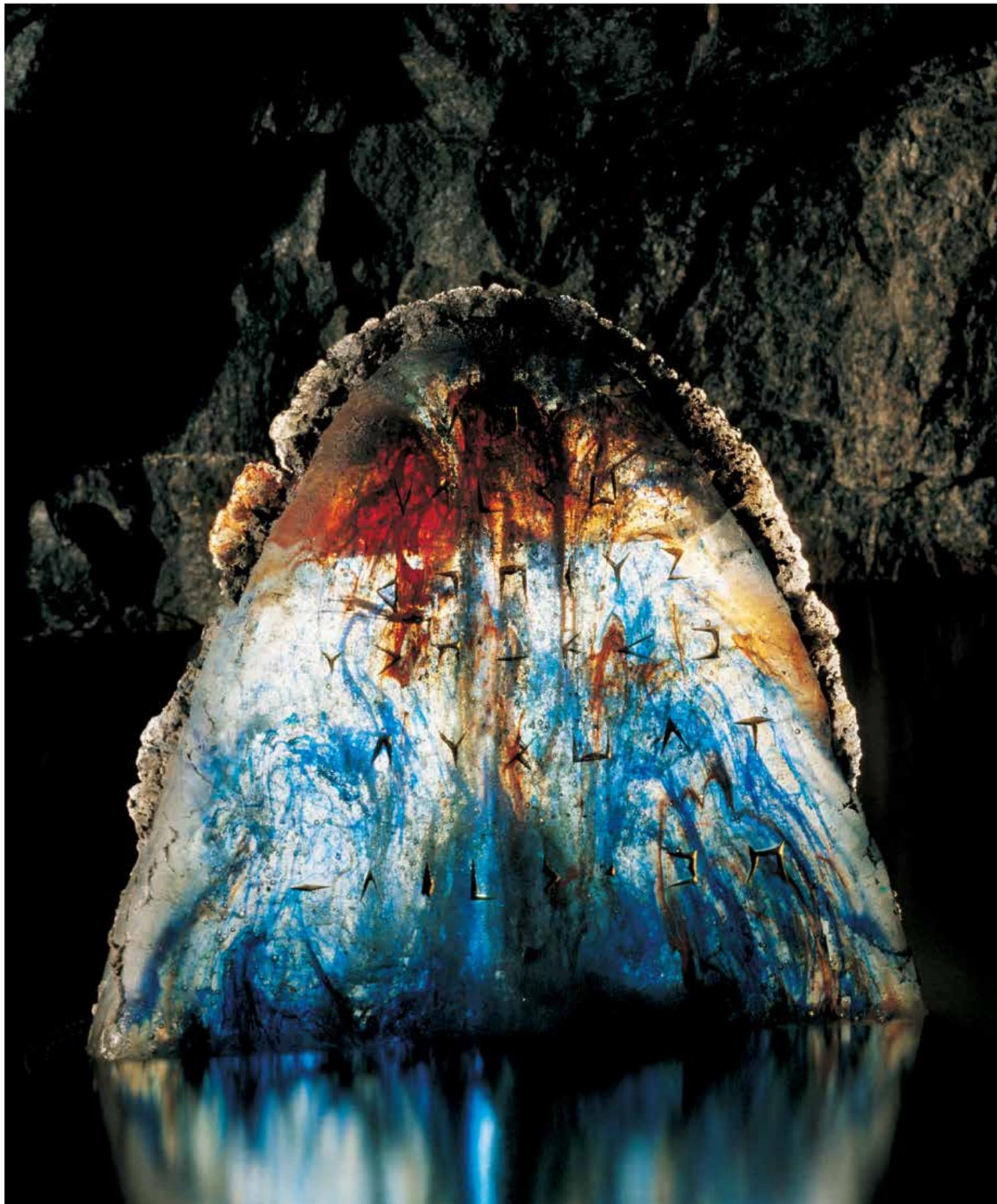


STEVE TOBIN MIND OVER MATTER

Foreword by David W. Houston  
Essay by Phoebe Hoban



*RIZZOLI*Electa



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DOOR, 1993

Cast glass

36 × 36 × 10 in.

Installation view of *Steve Tobin at Retretti*, Retretti Art Centre, Punkaharju, Finland, 1993

OPPOSITE

DETAIL OF TRINITY ROOT, 2005

Bronze

13 × 15 × 20 ft.

Installation at Trinity Church, corner of Wall Street and Broadway,  
New York, New York, 2005–2015

FOLLOWING SPREAD

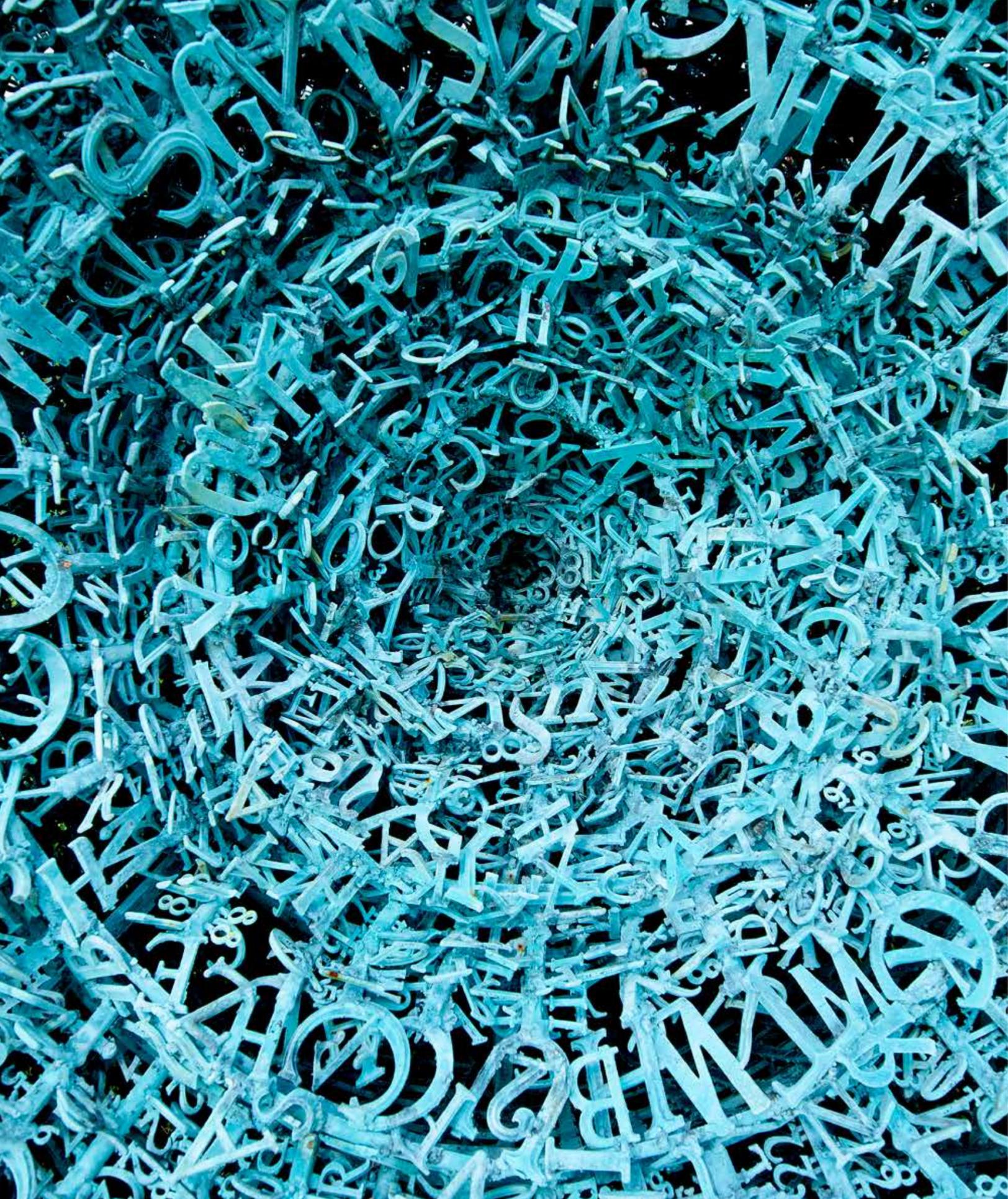
STEELROOT, 2007

Steel

11 ft. 6 in. × 13 ft. × 29 ft.







## Foreword

DAVID W. HOUSTON

From that which is perceived a definite conclusion  
may be drawn about what is imperceptible.

—NICOLAS STENO (1638–1686)

For an art world that values linearity, Steve Tobin's nomadic movement through forms and materials may at first pose a challenge. This book then is the perfect format to trace the rhizomatic trajectory of artist Steve Tobin. As much as his ongoing approach to art is an act of discovery, his works are characterized by conceptual unity and formal multiplicity. His work is grounded in a deep reverence for nature understood as a storehouse of infinitely changing forms animated by powerful hidden forces. This view of a *natura naturans*, a self-creative becoming of nature, has led him to explore an amazing diversity of materials and ideas.

Trained in theoretical mathematics at Tulane University, Tobin has always been driven to simultaneously explore art, music, and ideas. While immersing himself in the abstractions of mathematics and physics in the classroom, he was also exploring the materiality of studio art and playing saxophone with many of New Orleans's important jazz musicians in the city's vibrant music scene. The interconnectivity of sounds and materials has remained a fundamental concern that has deeply influenced the diversity of his studio practice and the wide range of his ideas.

In spite of its multiplicity of materials and forms, Tobin's work is anchored by two distinct themes. The first obvious and most dominant one is nature. His *Steelroots*, *Bronze Roots*, *Termite Hills*, and the *New Nature* series reinterpret natural forms through deeply poetic visual languages that reach beyond the realm of appearance. In looking past the mere perceptual, Tobin's recontextualization of nature evokes the invisible forces of the processes and ongoing creativity of *natura naturans*. Even in such works as the *Exploded Earth* series, his use of an exploded charge to "compose" the clay into sculptural vessels reflects the outward and inward pull of gravity on his materials through friezing invisible transitional natural forces in time.

The use of found objects, Tobin's second major concern, is easily identifiable in his "shelter" pieces: matzoh bread, individually bronzed; Korean War-era tank windows; glass magic lantern slides. (Less known is that the ethereal *Waterglass* installations are also composed of found objects, thousands of pieces of glass capillary tubing resourced from a landfill.) A combination of these two themes, in an interplay between natural forces and Tobin's "collected" objects, is well exemplified by his objet trouvé "paintings." Comprised of found objects organized into square or rectangular frames, his *Paintings* incorporate a wide range of objects to create patterns unified by the application of color and patina, reading as images from afar and becoming meticulously detailed assemblage sculptures on close viewing. Like the *Exploded Earth* series, the *Paintings* also are the direct result of the force of gravity on the pouring and scattering of objects into their armature or frame.

Nature and found objects appear on a different scale in Tobin's *Forest Floor* series, in which he casts a section of the forest floor in bronze—a technical feat that remarkably captures the minutiae of organic decay and growth, drawing the viewer close to inspect and marvel. His is a sculptural take on the botanical abundance of Dutch still life paintings such as Jan Breughel the Elder's *Bouquet* (1599), in which a similarly bewildering diversity of plant life is shown. While the sixteenth-century master's composed arrangements subtly direct the viewer's experience of the divine in the natural world, Tobin's seemingly random choice of forest floor sections leaves it to the viewer to connect allegorical symbolism to the objects that litter a few square feet of earth.

Tobin's monumental works also touch upon the nature-based and site-specific art movements that precede him. Andy Goldworthy's attentiveness to the local environment, both geographical and historical, come to mind, less so his ephemeral early works than his more permanent installation *Roof* (2005) at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., made of slate from a Virginia quarry used for many of the capital's historic buildings. Closer still is Christo and Jean-Claude's engagement with the so-called non-art community to complete and contextualize their work, as in *Running Fence* (1972–76)—in this case, the years of collaboration with local ranchers, the court hearings, and the environmental impact report as important as the viewers' experience. But in contrast to much of land art's ephemeral or impermanent qualities, Tobin's large-scale steel and bronze pieces draw from his fascination with the enduring presence of monuments that have

*Paintings*, 2004. Each 8 × 8 ft. Installation view of *Out of this World: Works by Steve Tobin*, James A. Michener Art Museum, Doylestown, Pennsylvania, 2014



Bending steel, John L. Lutz Welding & Fabrication, Frenchtown, New Jersey, 2012

withstood time, and, like the statues of Easter Island, can be wholly experienced outside of their original intent.

In fact, instead of site specificity, his sculptures are distinct objects that may be situated in a variety of environments, both indoors and out. Bringing the organic into the monumental, they harken back to the path of modernist abstraction found in the trajectory between the pioneering welded steel sculpture of Julio González and the monumentality of Mark di Suvero—a shift toward abstraction, toward a concept behind the object. Nevertheless, rather than self-referential sculptural objects, Tobin's sculptures are intended to be environments in themselves interacting with the surrounding spaces. In walking around and under the *Steelroots*, the viewer experiences the sinuous forms continually recomposing themselves, interacting with both the space around them and the shadows they cast on both the sculpture and the ground. Rather than being a self-expressive sculptural form, they instead may be read as abstract evocations of the hidden forces of nature revealed through the phenomenological interaction of nature, object, and viewer. The ever-changing subjective experience of the viewer is an inherently unique and unstable field of consciousness, one that Tobin has in mind when he composes these lyrical steel sculptures. The *Bronze Roots* are more literal, but no less experiential in creating a complex field of forms that reveal the portion of the tree that is usually hidden below the surface.

Tobin's sculptural use of clay and glass also operate outside the conventional context of these craft-identified materials and the hybrid world of craft as art, although the craft of ceramics—its attention to minutiae and detail even to a microscopic level—has had a profound influence. As a mathematics student at Tulane, Tobin came into contact with Gene Koss, a young first-year art professor. Koss, raised on a farm in the Midwest, was enamored with scale, weight, and the exploration of materiality in glass and steel. The mutual influence of a young student alive with ideas for exploring materials and a young professor who was already a master of materials and process, was important for both Tobin and Koss. As in his later work with Peter Voulkos in clay,

Tobin was also able to absorb the essential lessons of strong mature artists without feeling the need to mimic the iconography and substance of their distinctive visual languages. Neither traditional vessels nor postmodern art as craft, Tobin's glass and clay works are similar in process and purpose to his sculptures and paintings.

In looking at precedents for Steve Tobin's fascinatingly diverse body of work, I also find it fruitful to look at the field of music, one of Tobin's longtime interests. Upon visiting his industrial-scale studio in Quakertown, Pennsylvania, I walked through body after body of works displayed in large coherent groupings. It was during my second visit that I started to see the inner logic, consistency, and processes within each of the many distinctive, articulated body of works—a play of scale, materiality, and visual rhythm similar to the musical form of theme and variations.

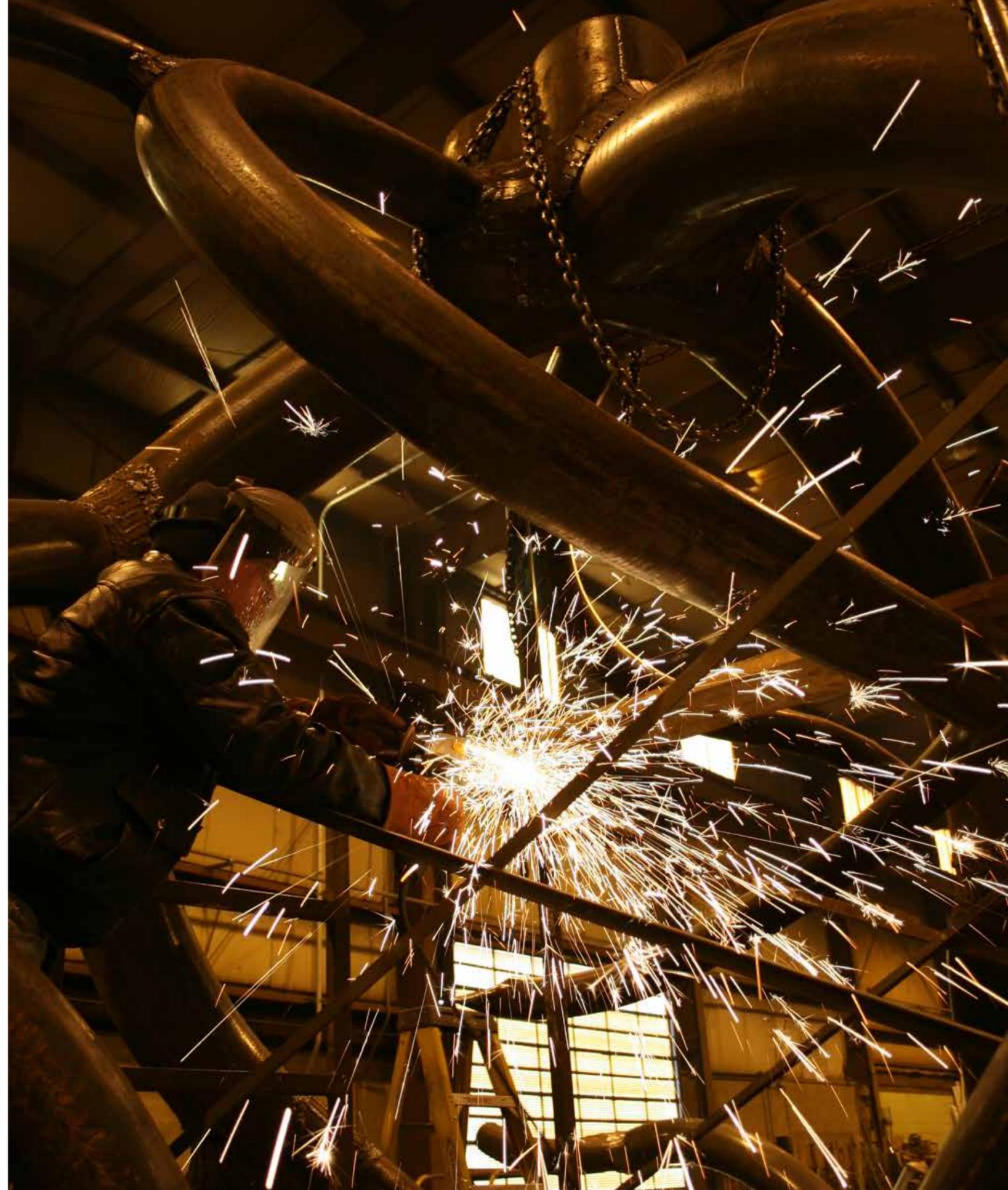
Taking one idea and exploring it in a multiplicity of ways takes talent, control, and vision. This idea of the variations on a single theme cuts across musical forms incorporating a range of instruments from solo to ensembles of varying sizes in the same way Tobin's work traverses scale, media, and form. Bach's *Goldberg Variations* and Beethoven's *Diabelli Variations* are obvious precedents that come to mind, but with Tobin's background as a jazz musician, I also think of the solo improvisations of saxophonists like Anthony Braxton and Roscoe Mitchell, who pass through the lines between classical music and jazz to create new forms with historical precedents.

In his 1919 essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," T. S. Eliot argued for an impersonal approach to art divorced from the self-expression and personality of the author. He saw the presence of the work, the nowness or timeliness of art, as suspended in a continuum of ideas and forms related to what he called "the pastness of the past," creating a context beyond the contemporary and the personal.

I have described Tobin's work as phenomenological. In the triumvirate of artist, object, and viewer, he privileges the experience of the viewer and the artwork over the self-expressive dominance of the artist. His selfless art of ideas does not neatly fit into the three recent dominant art world trends of formalism, self-expression, and conceptualism. While there is plenty of hand and skill behind each of his diverse bodies of work, the artist himself is relatively anonymous. The form and materiality of the work is at once present and strong, but the object is intended as a vehicle for experience rather than a thing-in-itself. Although Tobin is motivated by ideas, the ideas are the hidden unifying factor behind the work rather than the dominant theme or end result.

As the first survey of all of Steve Tobin's many bodies of work, this publication invites the reader to the opportunity to grasp the ideas, logic, and exploratory spirit behind one of contemporary art's most unique artists.

Welding steel, Prodex, Inc., Red Hill, Pennsylvania, 2010  
Following page: Steve Tobin exploding clay, Pleasant Valley, Pennsylvania, 2005





STEVE TOBIN MIND OVER MATTER



PREVIOUS SPREAD

CHOIR, 1990

Blown glass and forged iron

Heights variable, maximum 15 ft.

Installation view of *Glass Doesn't Grow in the Forest*,  
St. Augustine Chapel, Antwerp, Belgium, 1990

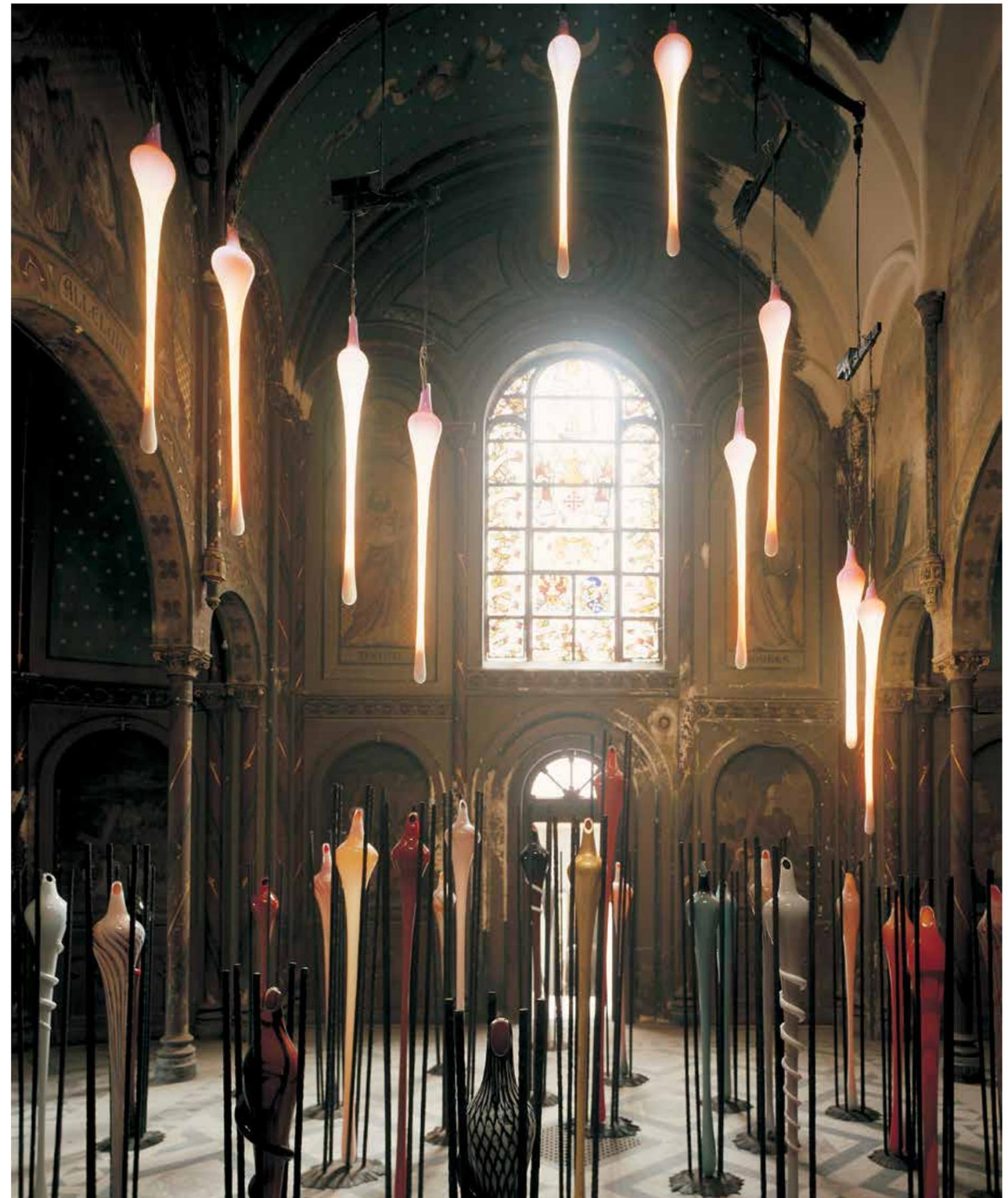
OPPOSITE

ASCENSION, 1990

Mobile of blown glass, forged iron, and neon

30 × 30 × 30 ft.

Installation view of *Glass Doesn't Grow in the Forest*,  
St. Augustine Chapel, Antwerp, Belgium, 1990



SQUEEZE, 2017  
Cast bronze  
9 ft. 6 in × 7 ft. 6 in. × 5 ft.



SQUEEZE, 1998  
Cast bronze  
6 × 10 × 4 in.



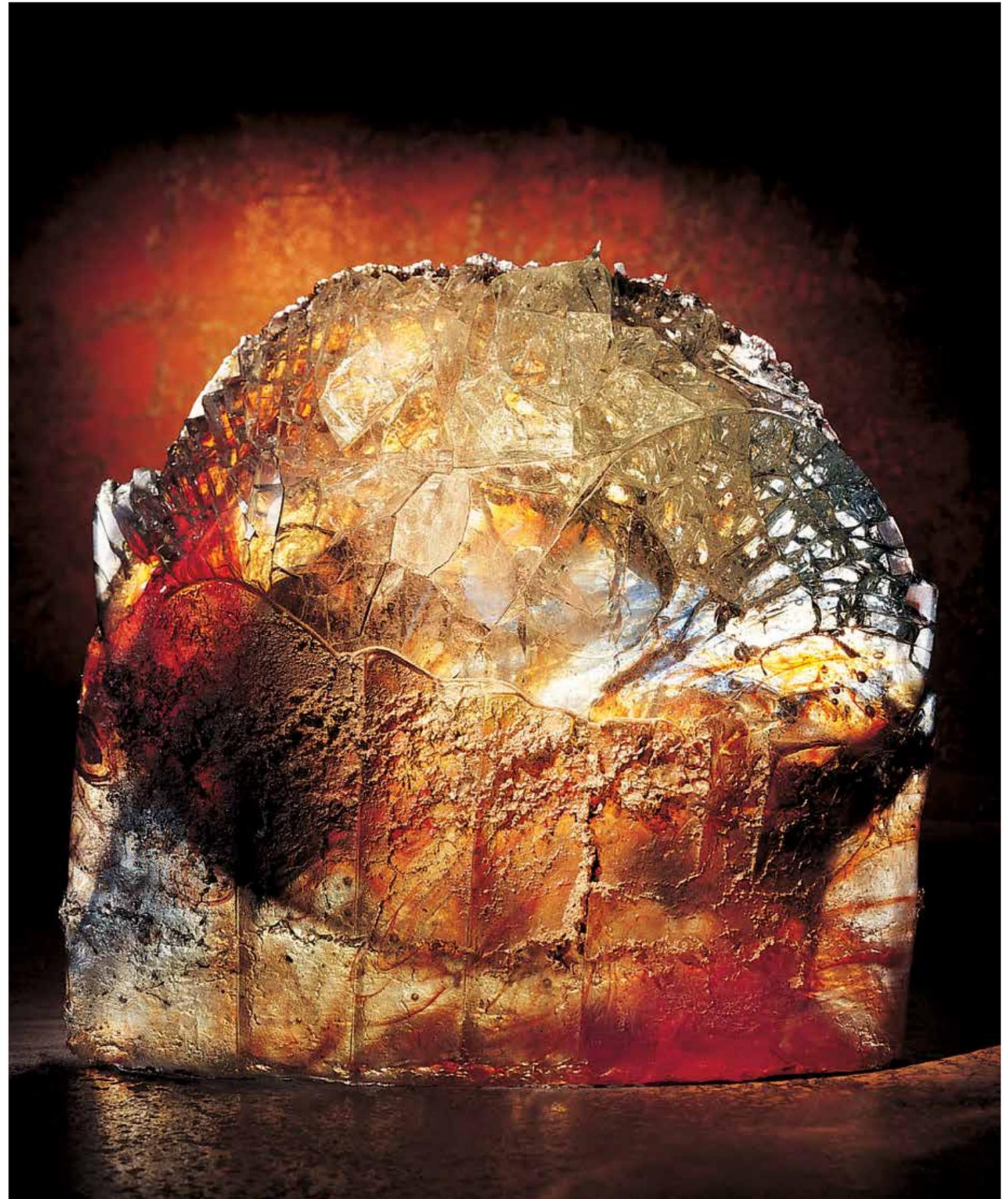
DETAIL OF SQUEEZE, 2013  
Cast bronze



SQUEEZE, 2013  
Cast bronze  
10 × 9 × 5 in.



DOOR, 1992  
Cast and exploded glass  
16 × 15 × 6 in.



DOOR, 1993

Cast glass

60 × 48 × 12 in.

Installation view of *Steve Tobin at Retretti*, Retretti Art Centre, Punkaharju, Finland, 1993

FOLLOWING SPREAD, LEFT

DOOR, 1993

Cast glass

78 × 30 × 12 in.

Installation view of *Steve Tobin at Retretti*, Retretti Art Centre, Punkaharju, Finland, 1993

FOLLOWING SPREAD, RIGHT

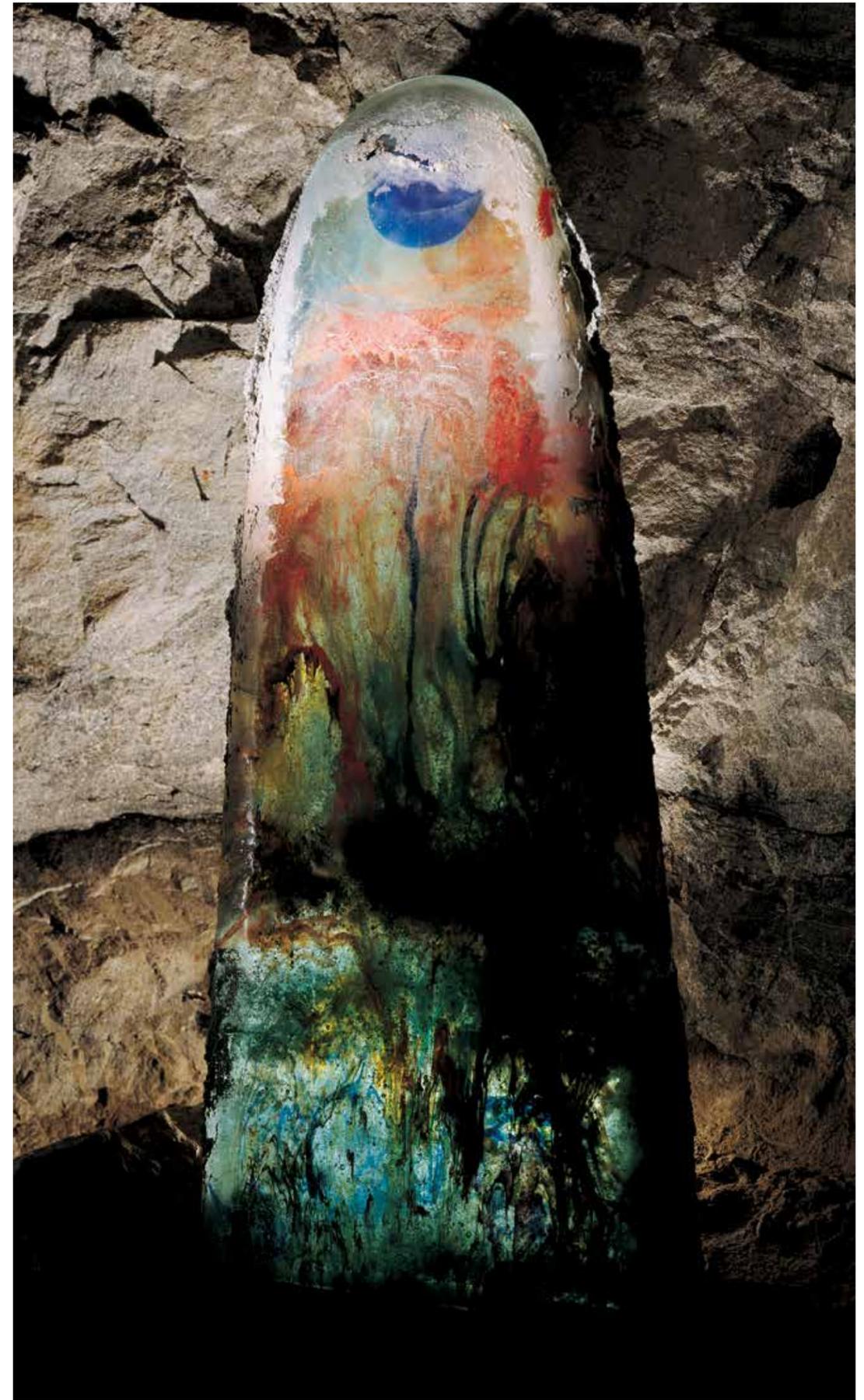
DOOR, 1993

Cast glass

84 × 30 × 12 in.

Installation view of *Steve Tobin at Retretti*, Retretti Art Centre, Punkaharju, Finland, 1993







PREVIOUS SPREAD

DOOR ROOM, 1992

Cast glass

Heights variable, maximum 84 in.

Installation view of *Door Room*, artist's studio, Pleasant Valley, Pennsylvania

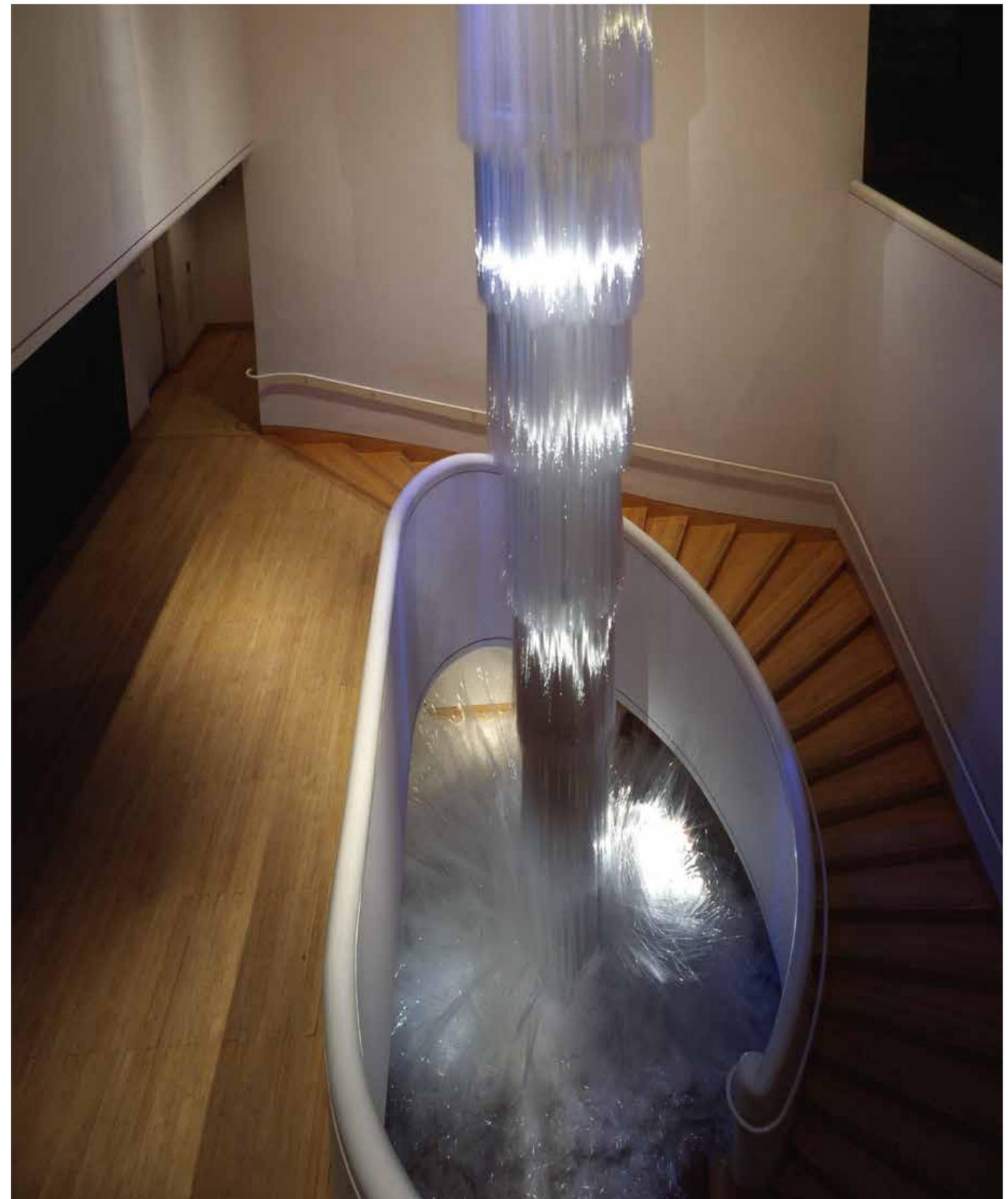
OPPOSITE

WATER COLUMN, 1992

Glass capillary tubes

41 × 20 × 20 ft.

Installation view of *Waterglass*, American Craft Museum (Museum of Arts and Design),  
New York, New York, 1992

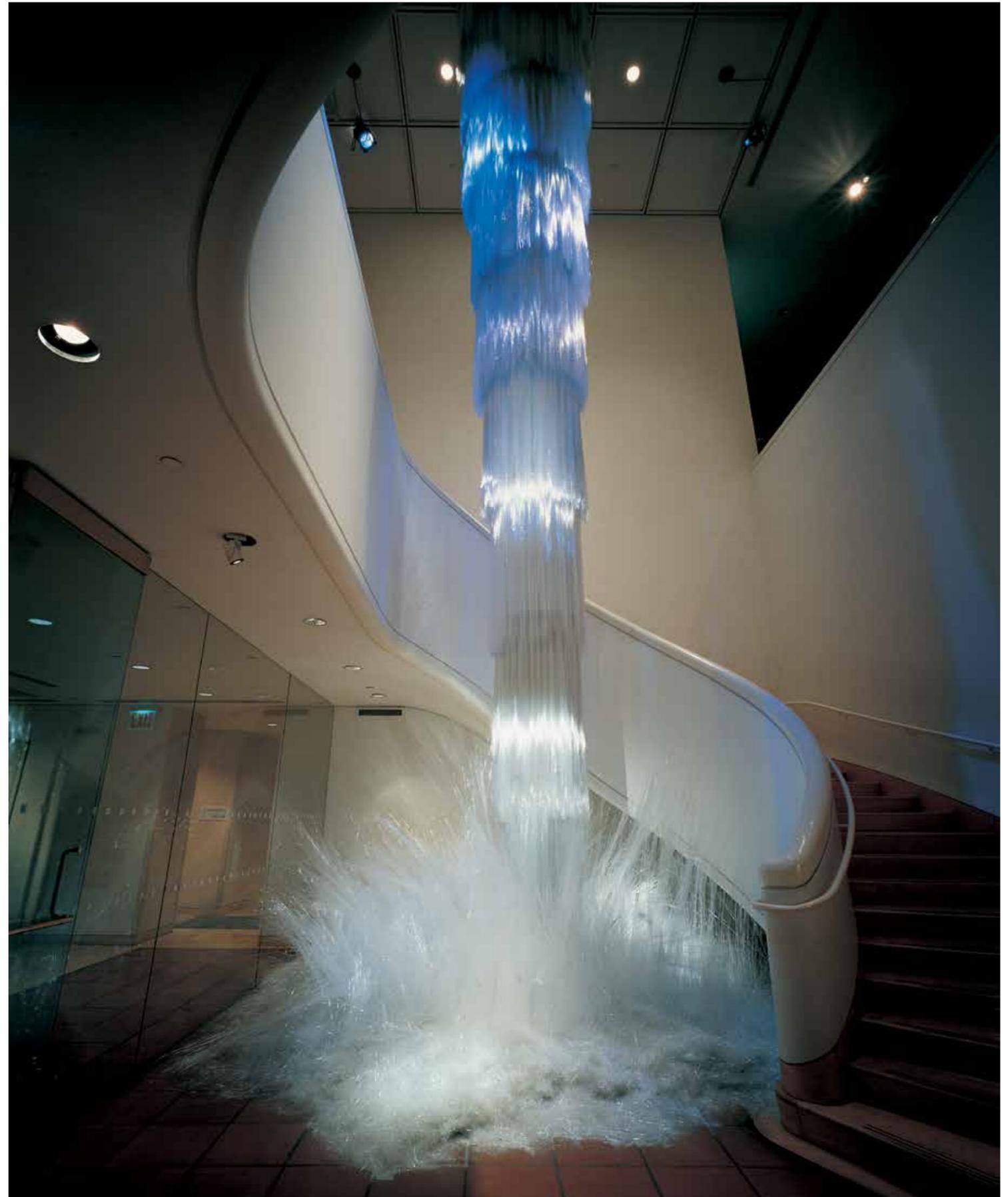


WATER COLUMN, 1992

Glass capillary tubes

41 × 20 × 20 ft.

Installation view of *Waterglass*, American Craft Museum (Museum of Arts and Design),  
New York, New York, 1992



LA CASCADE, 1991

Glass capillary tubes  
20 × 20 × 80 ft.

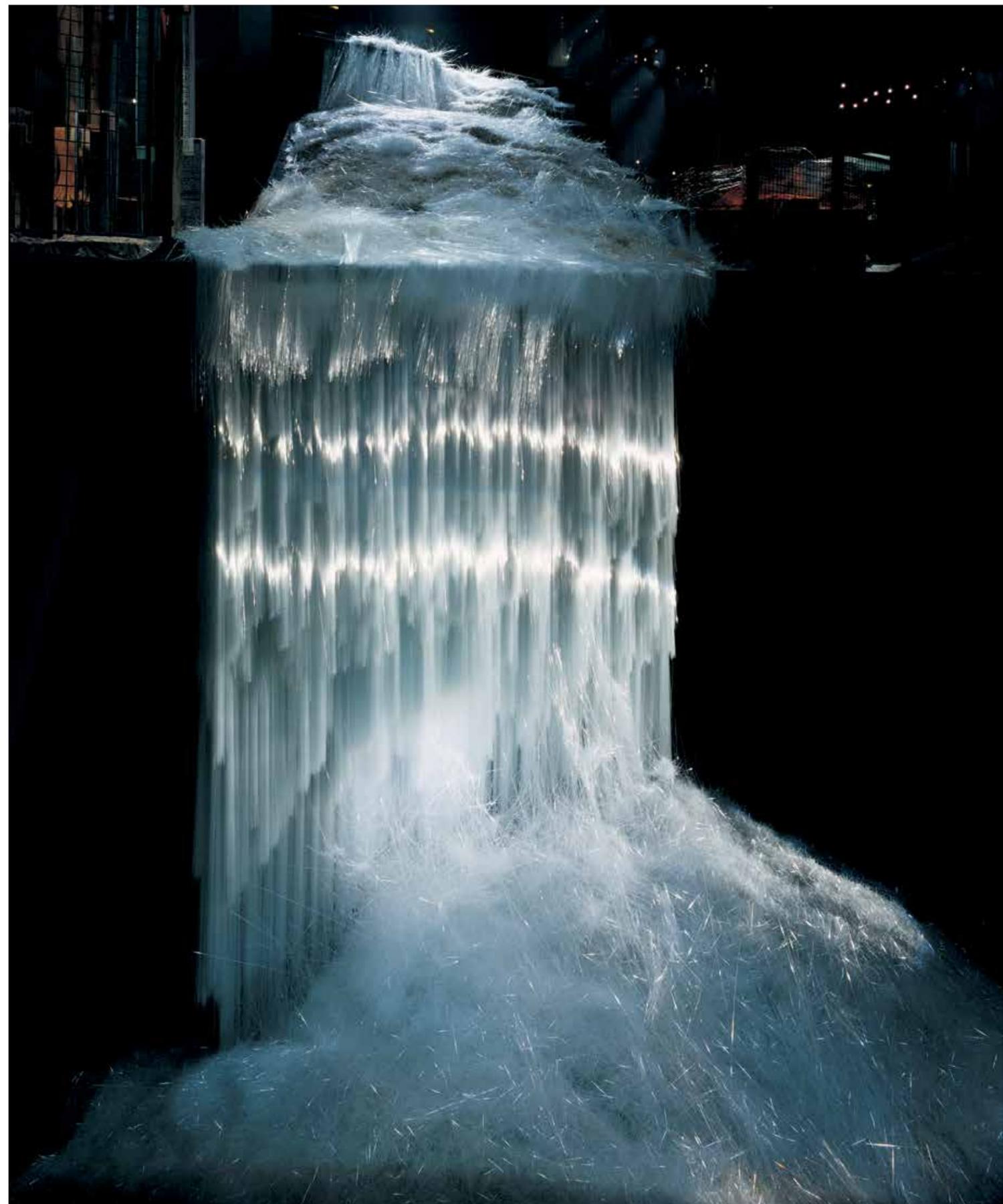
Installation view of *Le verre*, Espace Duchamp-Villon, Rouen, France, 1991

FOLLOWING SPREAD

RETRETTI RIVER, 1993

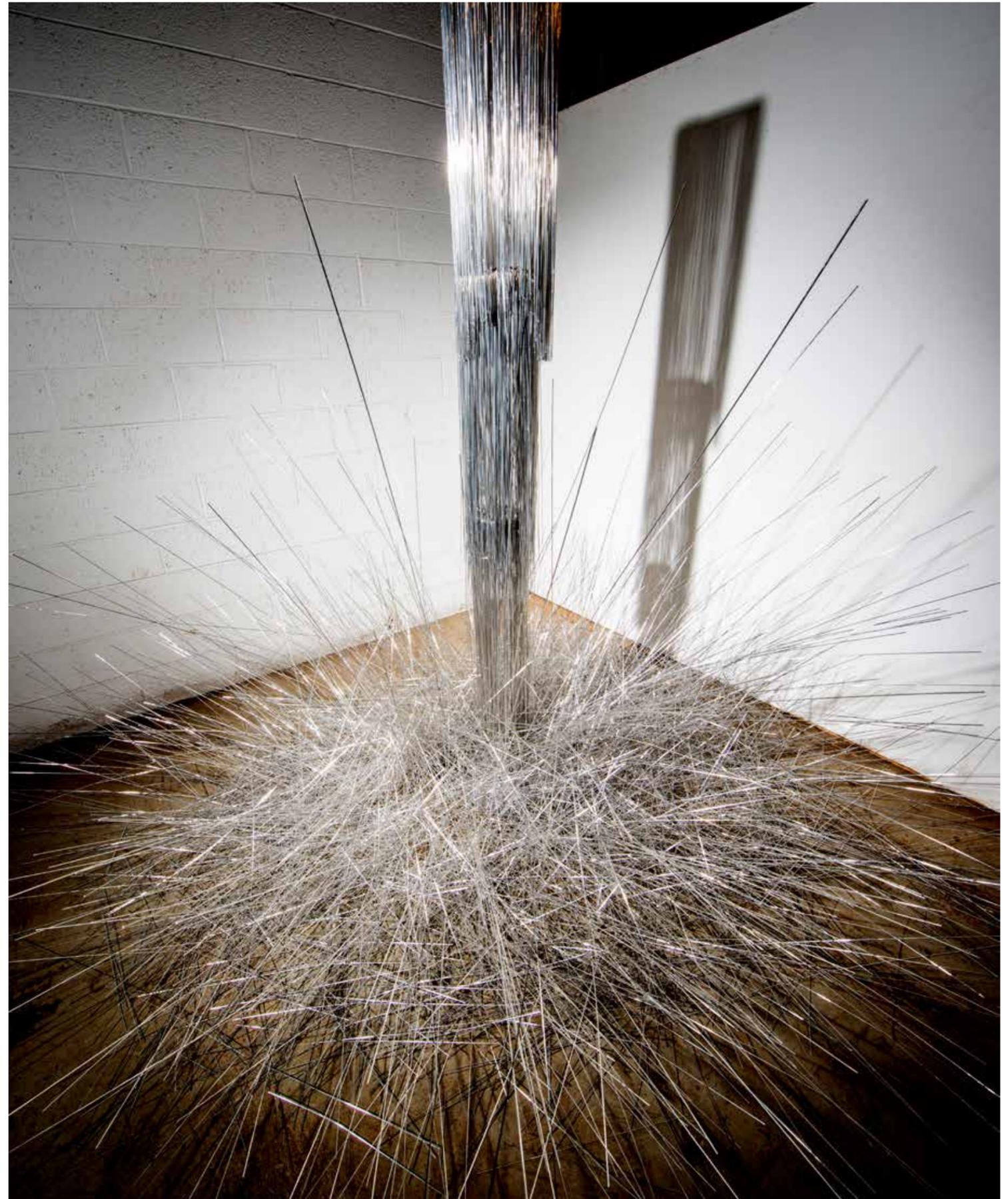
Glass capillary tubes  
18 × 25 × 100 ft.

Installation view of *Steve Tobin at Retretti*, Retretti Art Centre,  
Punkaharju, Finland, 1993





STEELWATERS, 2018  
Metal rods  
96 × 96 × 72 in.



WEST PALM BEACH RIVER, 1994

Glass capillary tubes

20 × 60 × 80 ft.

Installation view of *Waterworks*, Palm Beach Community College Museum of Art,  
Lake Worth, Florida, 1994



TEPEE, 1992  
Glass capillary tubes and steel  
25 × 12 × 12 ft.



EARTH BRONZE, 1997  
Cast bronze  
84 × 48 × 12 in.



EARTH BRONZE, 1997  
Cast bronze  
96 × 60 × 12 in.



EARTH BRONZE, 1997  
Cast bronze  
96 × 60 × 12 in.



EARTH BRONZE, 1997  
Cast bronze  
96 × 60 × 12 in.



EARTH BRONZE, 1997

Cast bronze  
96 × 60 × 12 in.

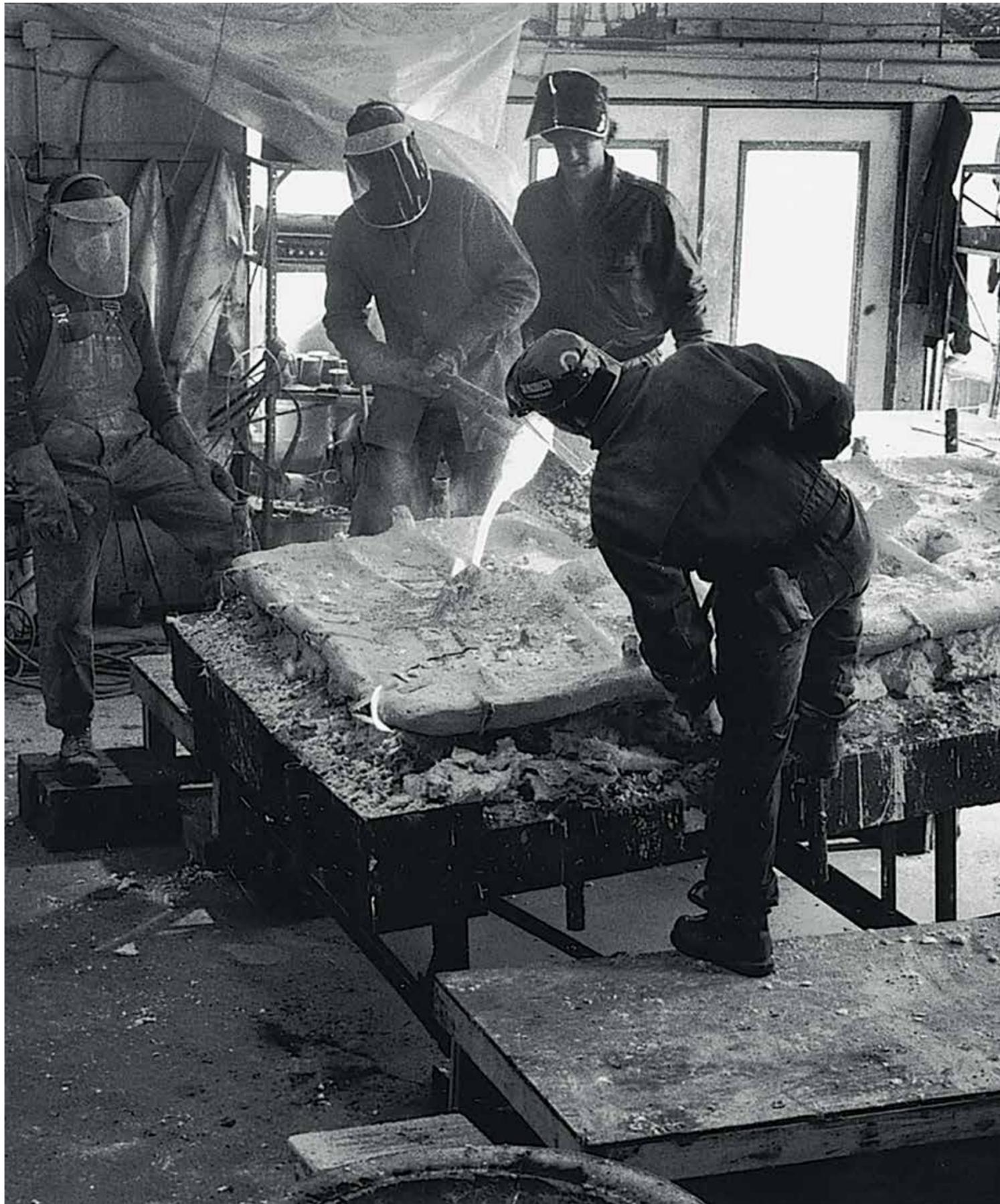
FOLLOWING SPREAD, LEFT

Casting an *Earth Bronze* at the artist's studio, Pleasant Valley, Pennsylvania, 1997

FOLLOWING SPREAD, RIGHT

DETAIL OF EARTH BRONZE  
Cast bronze





TERMITE HILL, 1997  
Cast bronze  
84 × 72 × 72 in.



TERMITE HILL, 2001

Cast bronze

10 × 8 × 8 ft.

Installation view of *Earth Bronzes*, American Museum of Natural History,  
New York, New York, 1999–2001

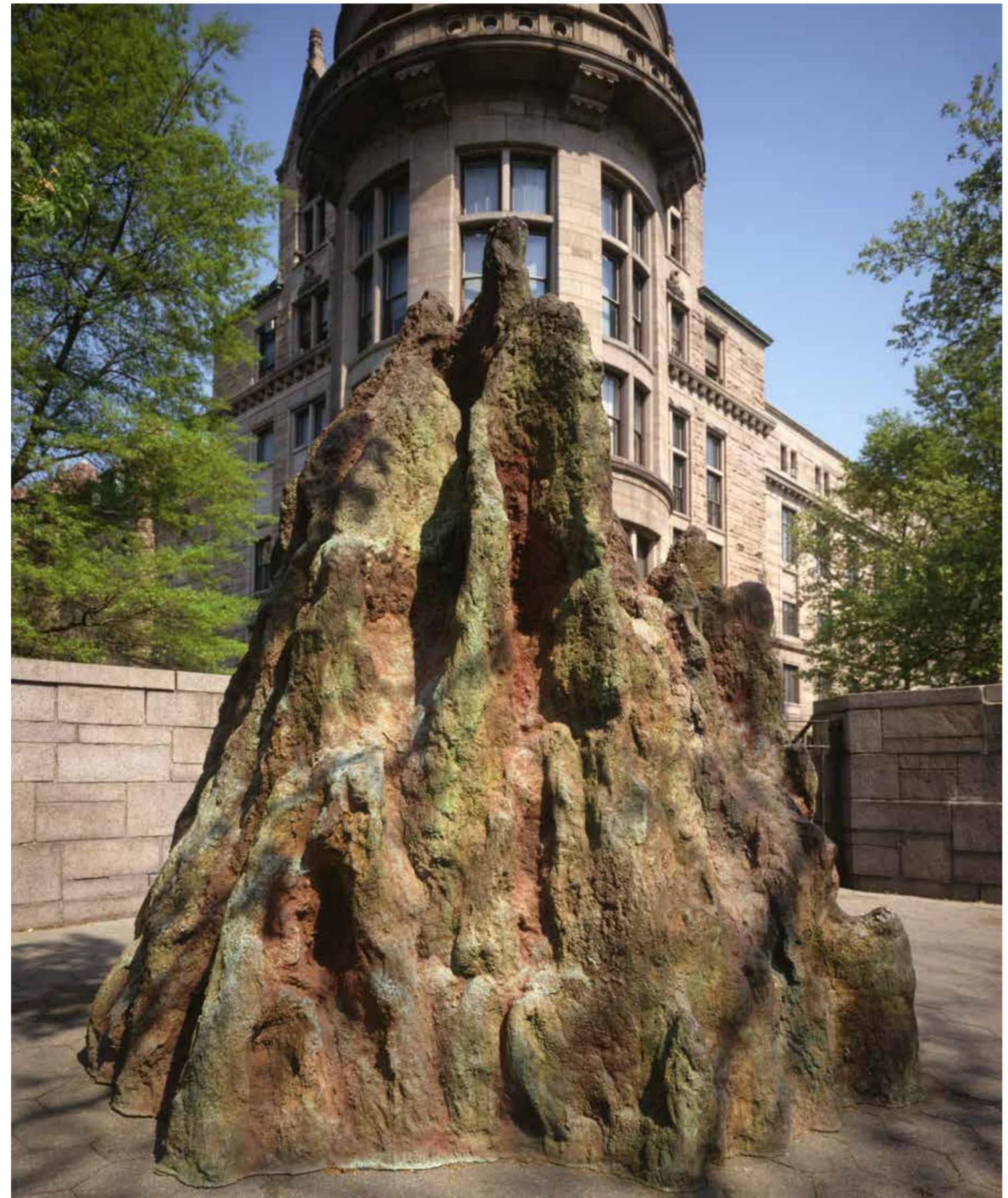
FOLLOWING SPREAD

TERMITE HILLS, 1998

Cast bronze

Heights variable, maximum 13 ft.

Installation view of *Termite Hills*, Art et Industrie,  
New York, New York, 1998





TERMITE HILL, 2001

Cast bronze

12 × 8 × 6 ft.

Installation view of *Earth Bronzes*, American Museum of Natural History,  
New York, New York, 1999–2001

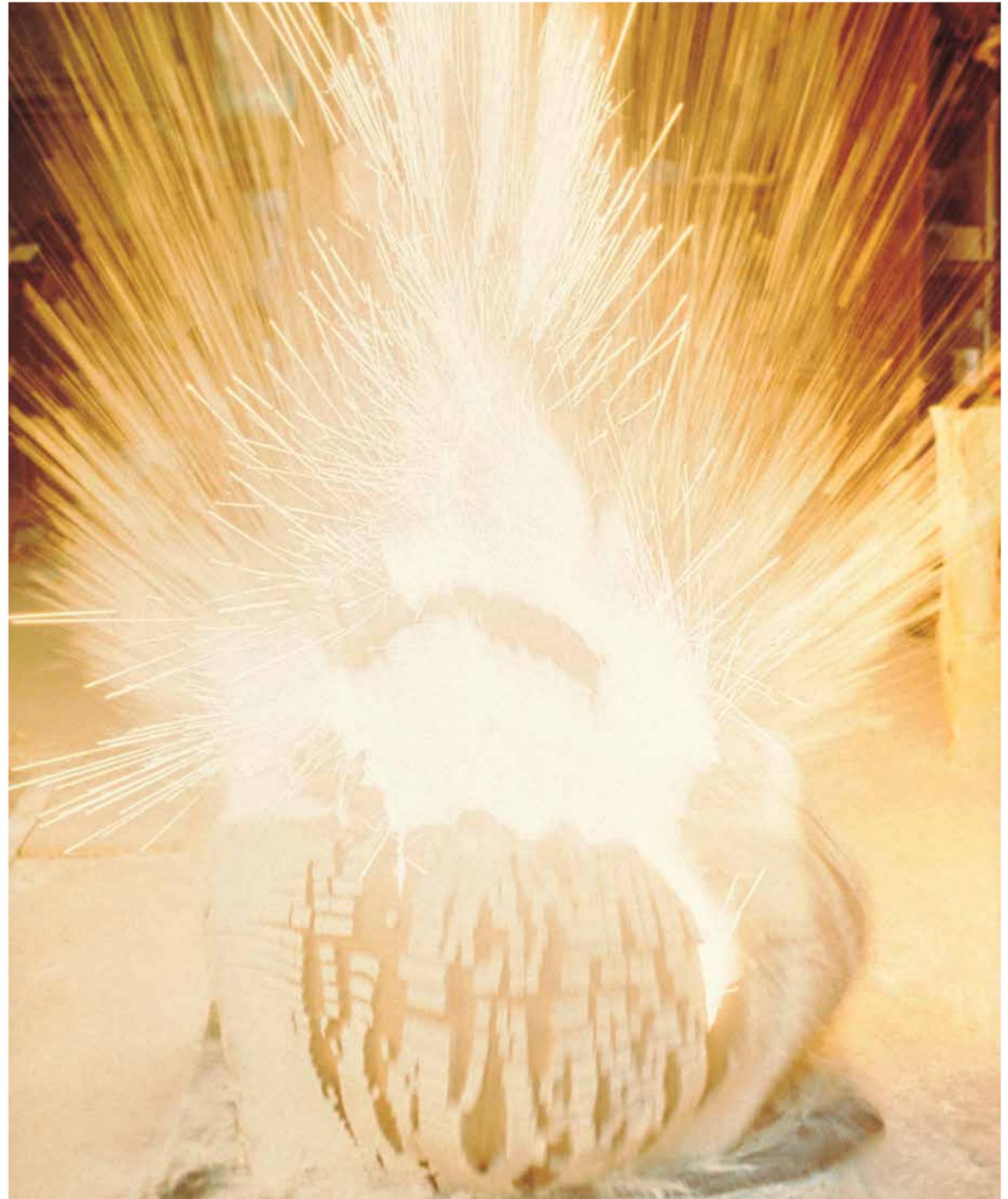


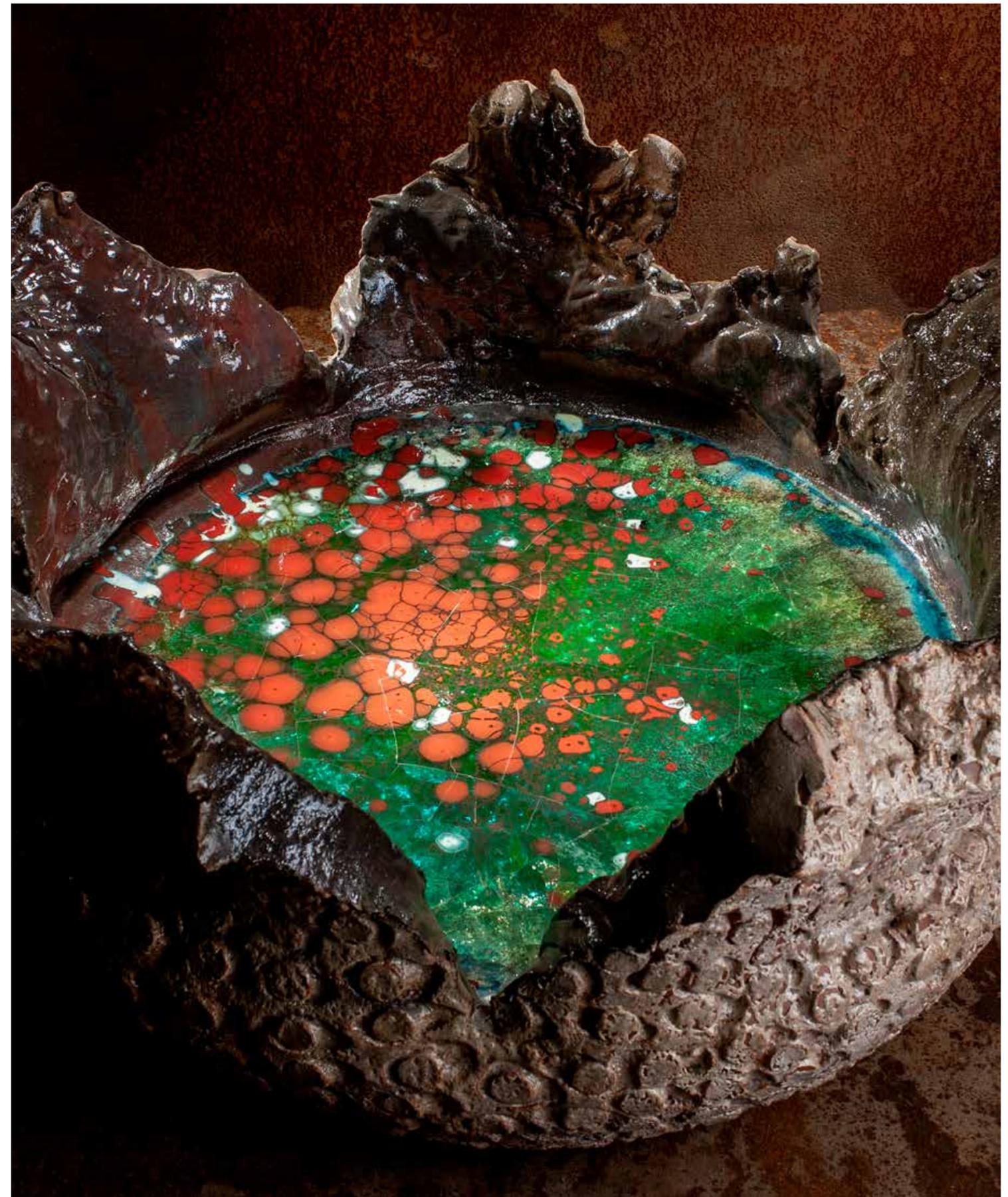
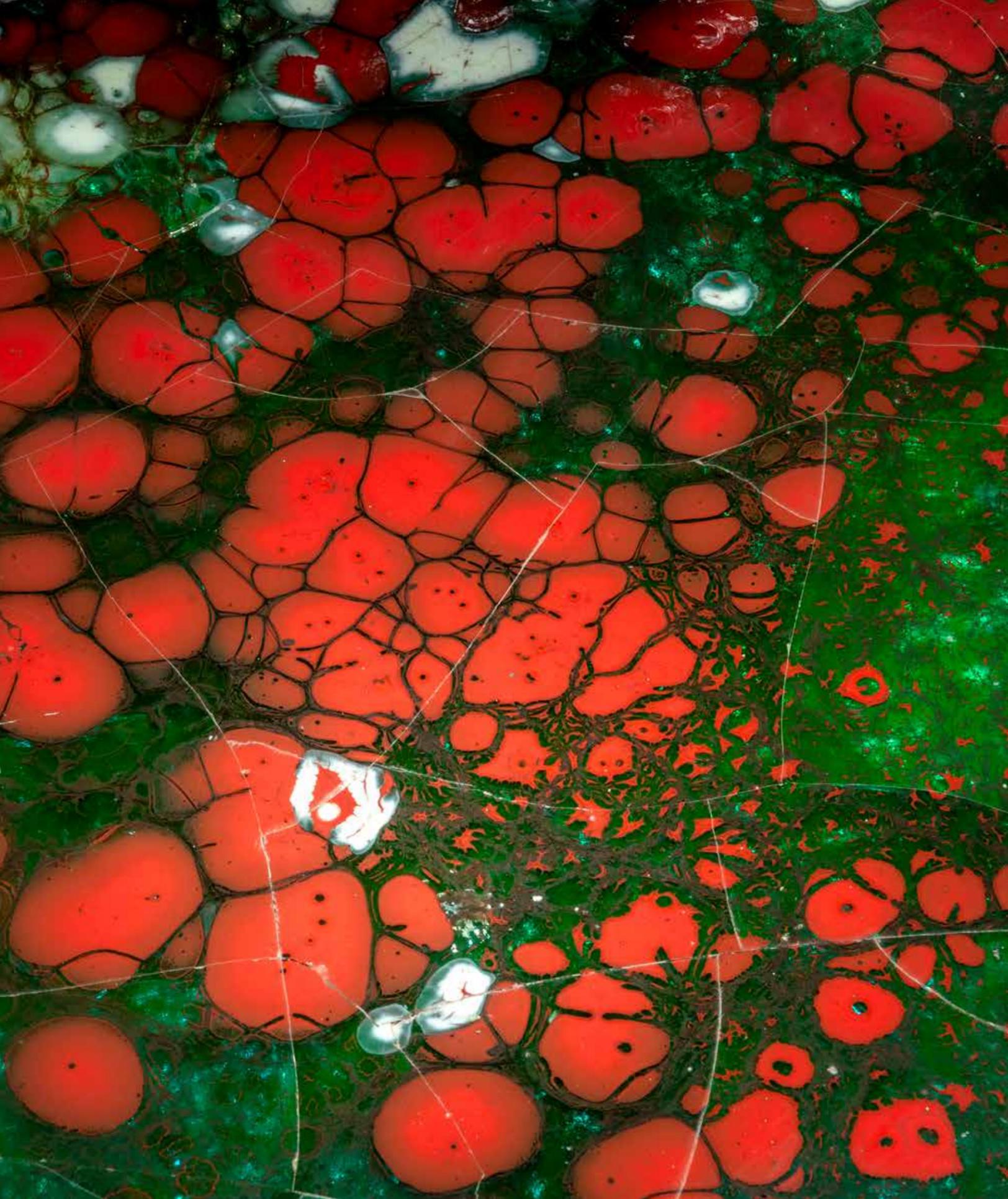
Exploding clay at the artist's studio, Pleasant Valley, Pennsylvania, 2002

FOLLOWING SPREAD, LEFT AND RIGHT

DETAIL OF EXPLODED EARTH

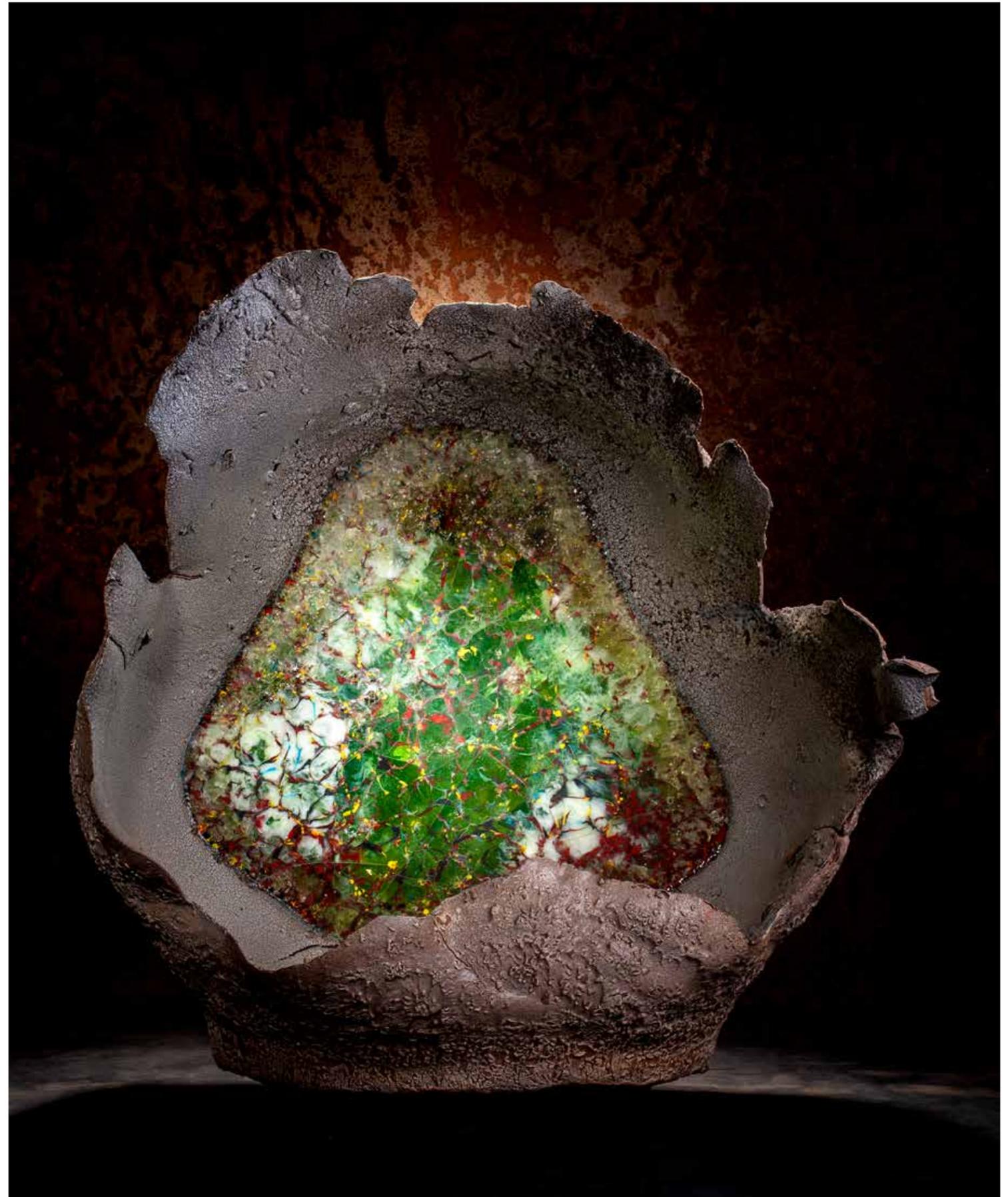
Ceramic and glass

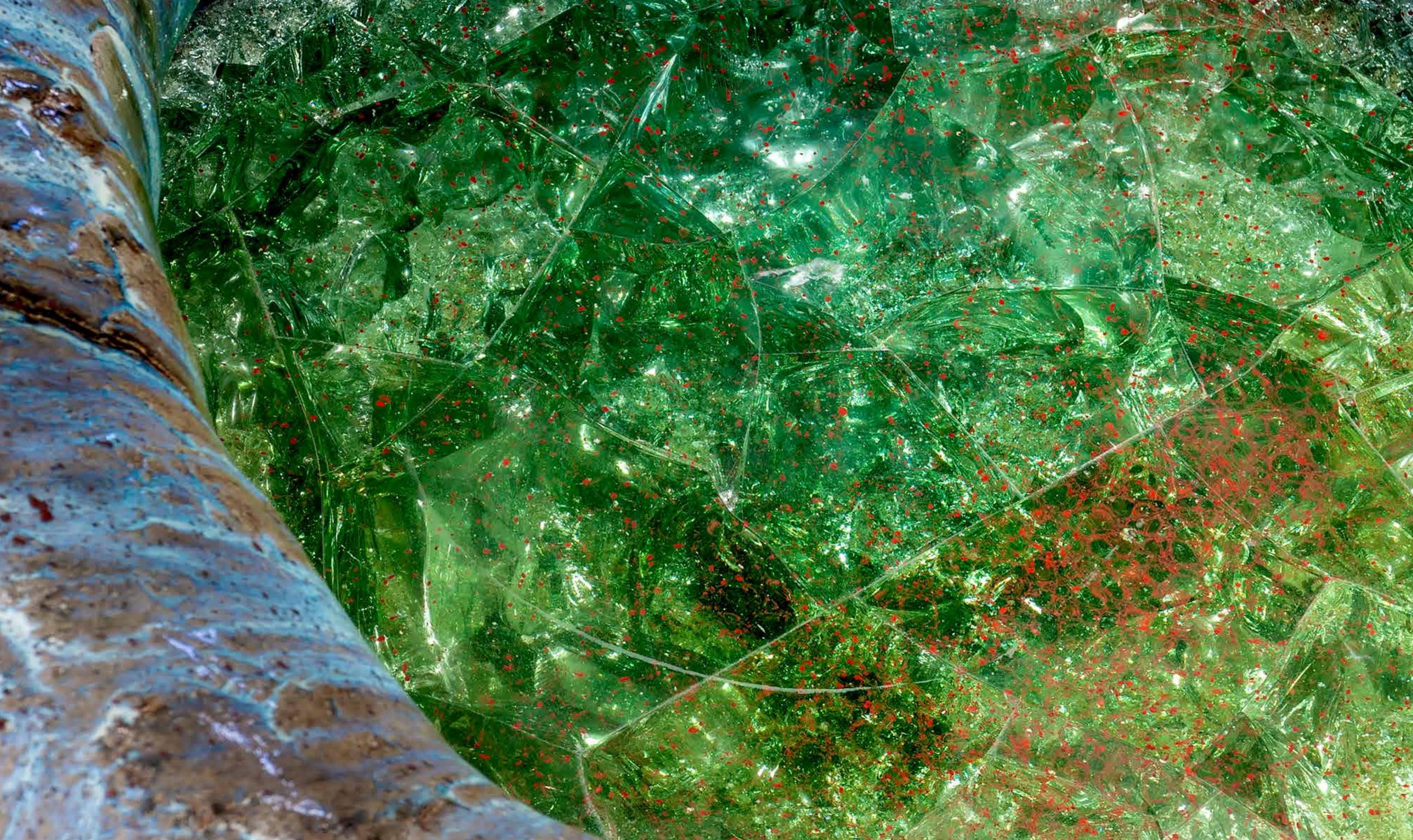




EXPLODED EARTH, 2004  
Ceramic and glass  
48 × 48 × 24 in.

FOLLOWING SPREAD  
DETAIL OF EXPLODED EARTH  
Ceramic and glass





EXPLODED EARTH, 2006  
Ceramic and glass  
62 × 50 × 34 in.



BUDDHA, 2007  
Ceramic and glass  
48 × 48 × 40 in.

FOLLOWING SPREAD

Installation view of exploded clay, Quakertown, Pennsylvania, 2014



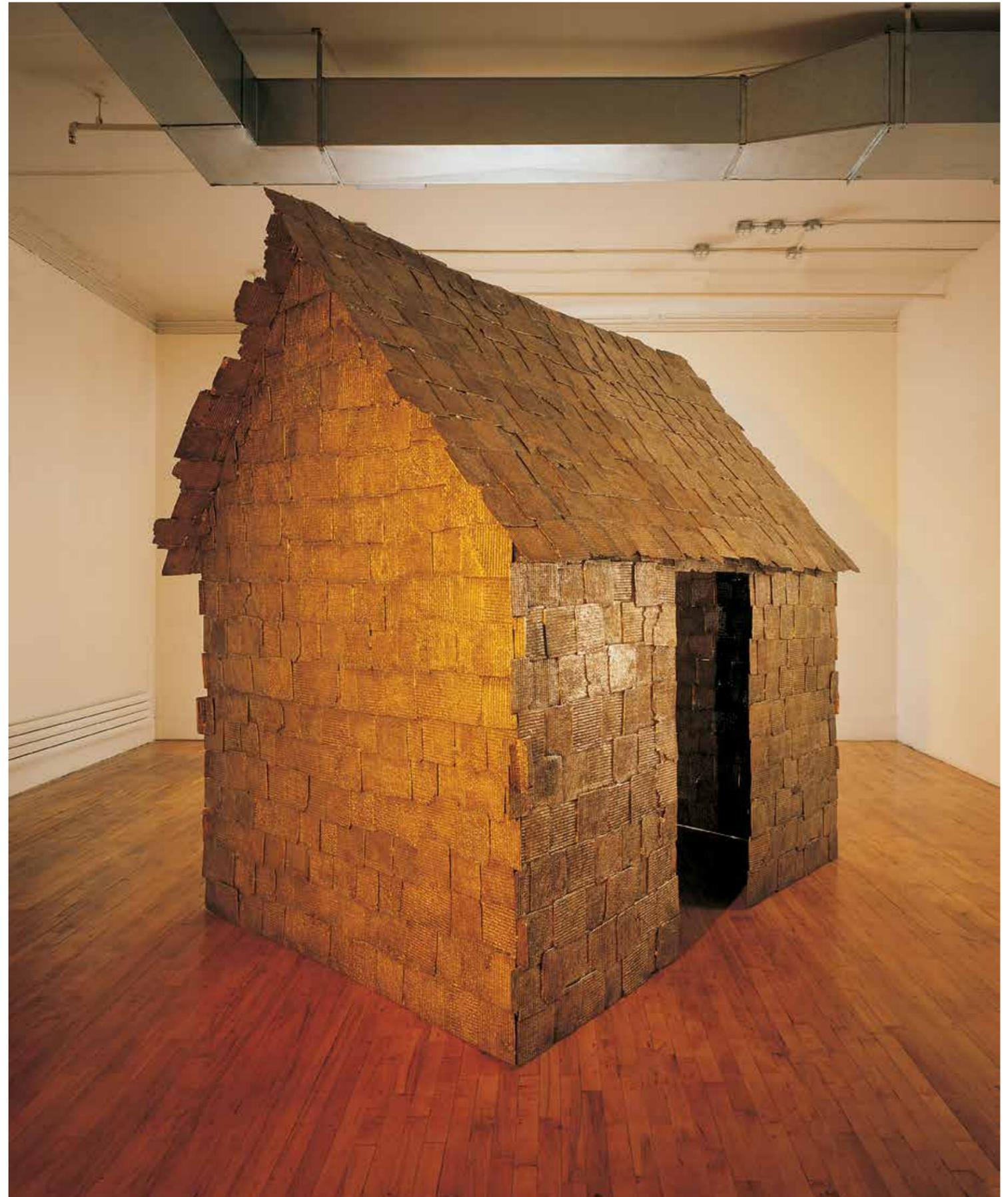


MATZOH HOUSE, 1996

Cast bronze

9 × 8 × 6 ft.

Installation view of *Matzoh House*, B.A.I. Gallery, New York, New York, 1996



OPPOSITE

LANTERN HOUSE, 2001

Antique glass lantern slides  
10 × 6 × 8 ft.

FOLLOWING SPREAD, LEFT

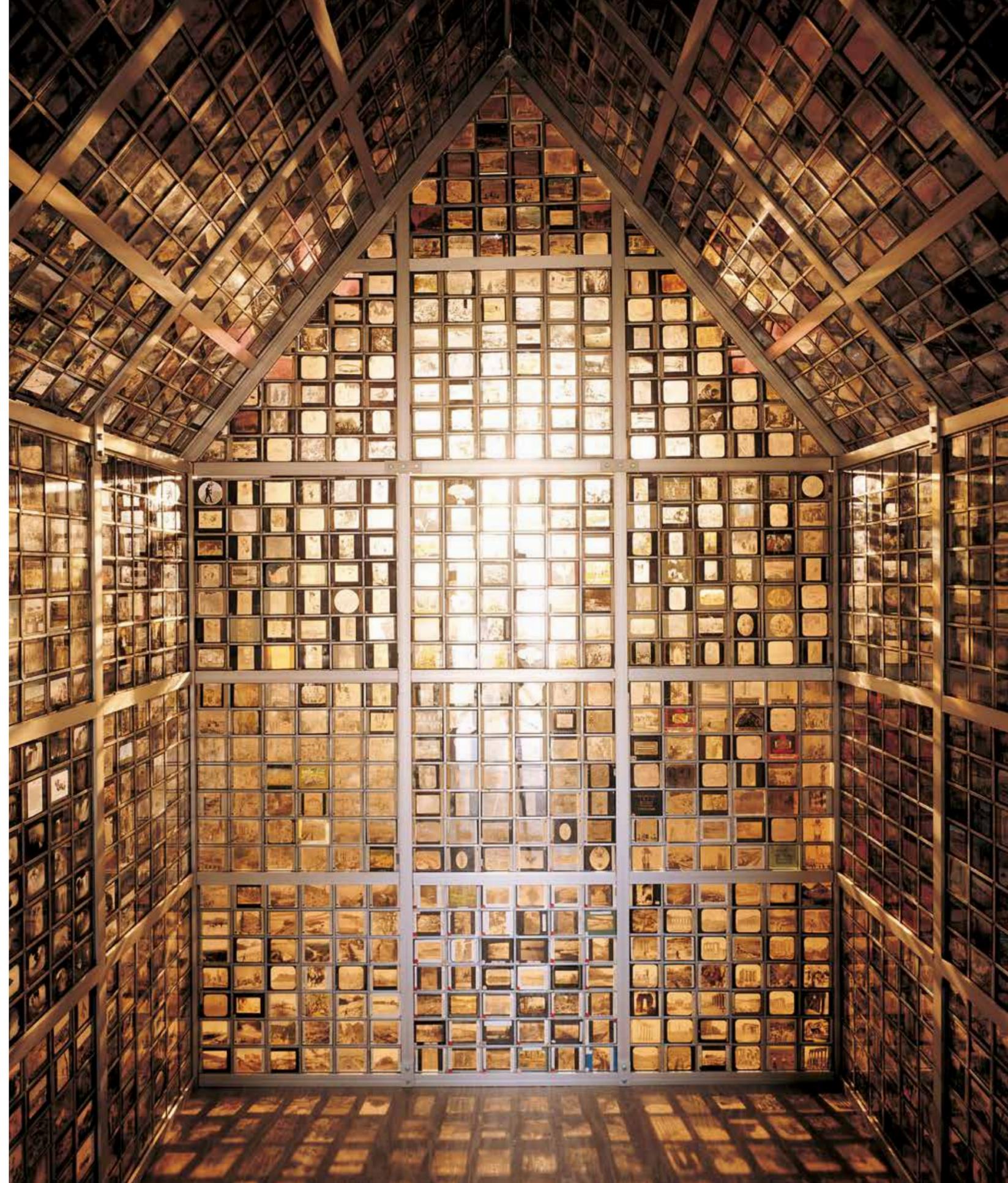
DETAIL OF LANTERN HOUSE

Antique glass lantern slides

FOLLOWING SPREAD, RIGHT

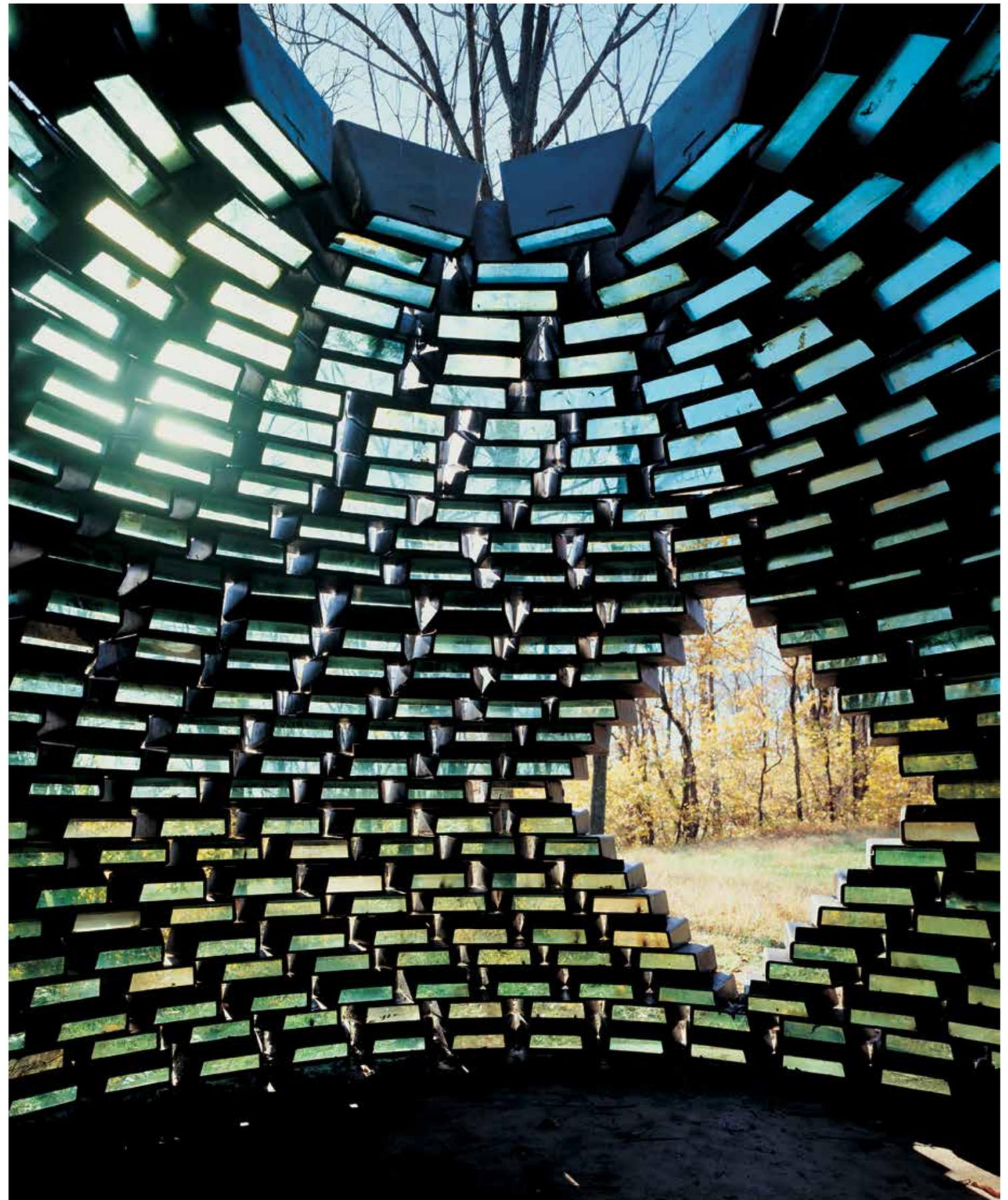
LANTERN HOUSE, 2001, AND SYNTAX, 2007

Installation view of *Steve Tobin: Southern Roots* at Cheekwood Estate and Gardens,  
Nashville, Tennessee, 2016–17





OPPOSITE AND FOLLOWING SPREAD  
ADOBE, 1994  
Welded M-60 tank windows  
8 × 14 × 14 ft.





SYNTAX, 2008  
Cast and welded bronze  
36 × 36 × 12 in.



Welding *Syntax*, 2004  
Cast and welded bronze

FOLLOWING SPREAD, LEFT TO RIGHT

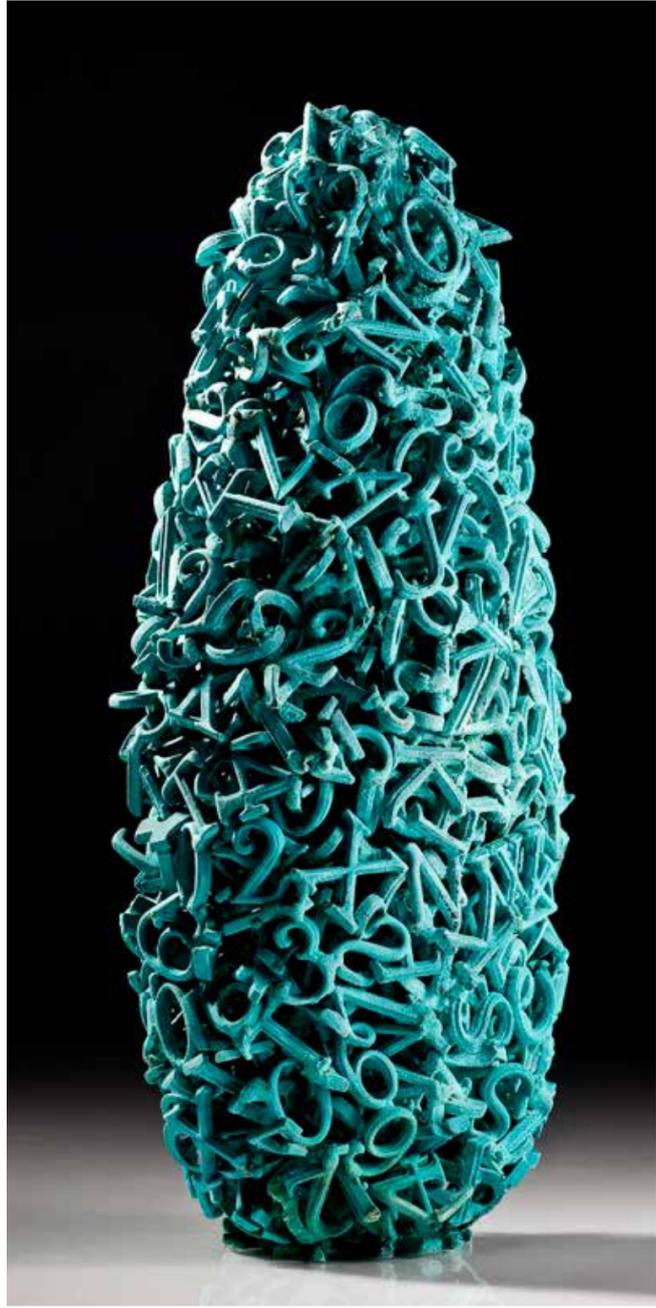
SYNTAX, 2007  
Cast and welded bronze  
21 × 12 × 9 in.

SYNTAX, 2007  
Cast and welded bronze  
22 × 8 × 6 in.

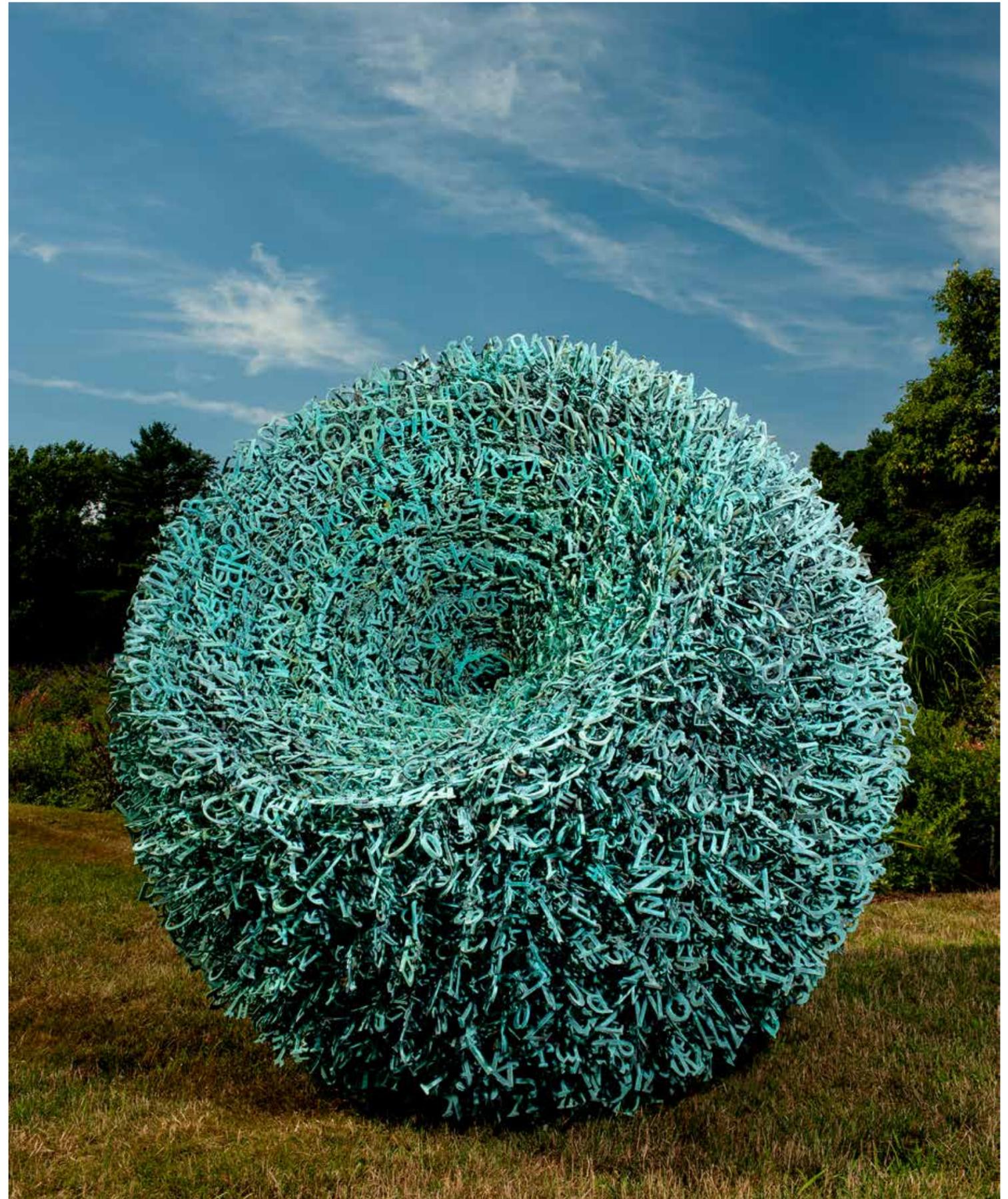
SYNTAX, 2007  
Cast and welded bronze  
13 × 5 × 4 in.

SYNTAX, 2007  
Cast and welded bronze  
16 × 18 × 6 in.





SYNTAX, 2005  
Cast and welded bronze  
74 × 74 × 74 in.



PAINTING, 2002  
Mixed media on canvas  
50 × 34 in.

FOLLOWING SPREAD, LEFT  
PAINTING, 2003  
Mixed media on canvas  
50 × 50 in.

FOLLOWING SPREAD, RIGHT  
PAINTING, 2003  
Mixed media on canvas  
50 × 50 in.







PREVIOUS SPREAD

DETAIL OF PAINTING, 2004  
Mixed media on canvas

OPPOSITE

PAINTING, 2003  
Mixed media on canvas  
74 × 50 in.



WALKING ROOTS, 2002

Cast bronze

9 × 12 × 14 ft.

Installation view of *Naked Earth*, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, Los Angeles, California, 2002–2003

FOLLOWING SPREAD

ROMEO AND JULIET, 2003

Cast bronze

9 × 12 × 13 ft. (left) and 10 ft. 6 in. × 12 ft. × 15 ft. (right)

Installation view of *Aerial Roots*, Grounds for Sculpture, Hamilton, New Jersey, 2012







PREVIOUS SPREAD

ROOTS, 2001

Cast bronze  
12 × 16 × 14 ft.

OPPOSITE

DETAIL OF TRINITY ROOT, 2005

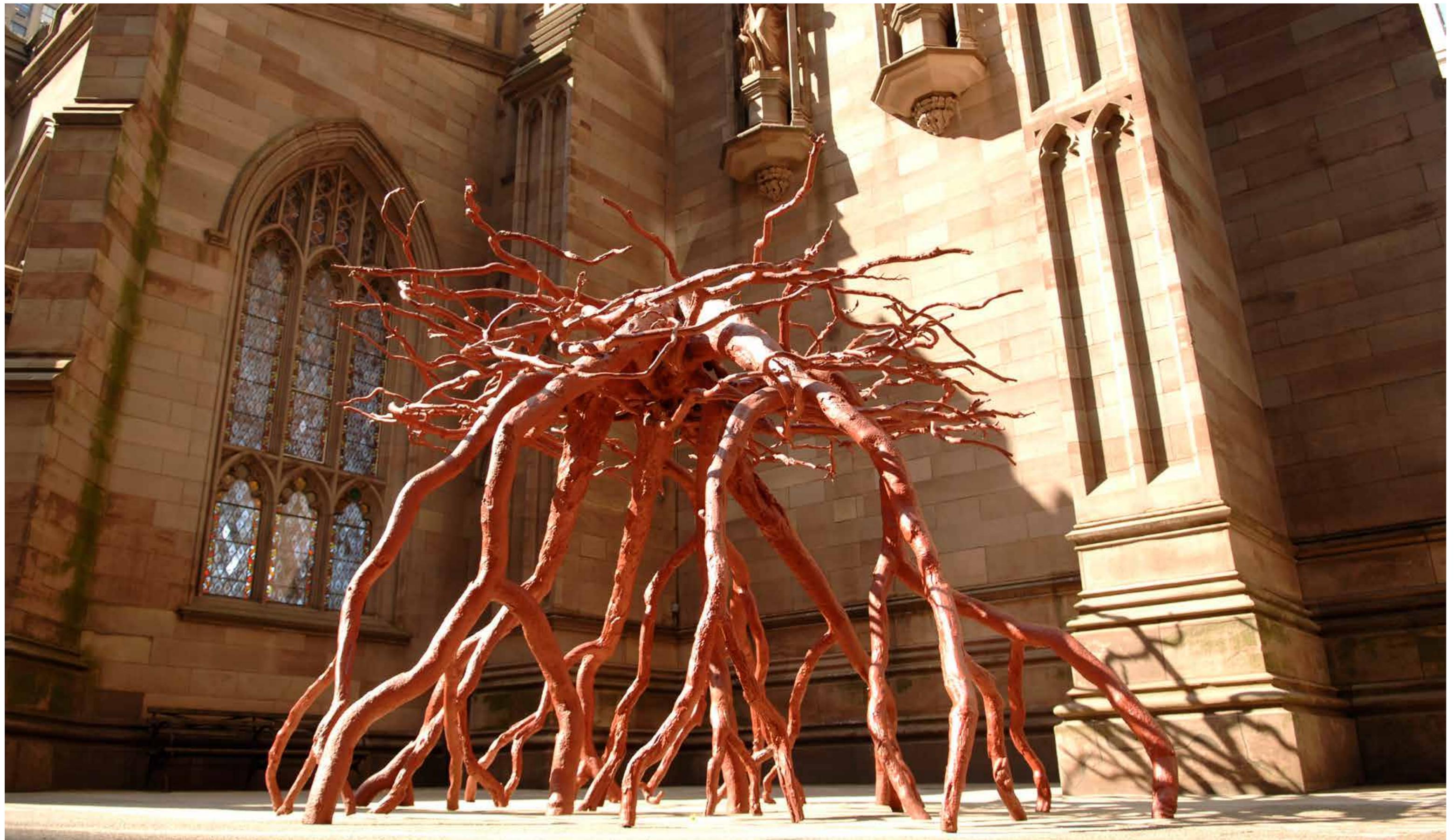
Cast bronze

FOLLOWING SPREAD

TRINITY ROOT, 2005

Cast bronze  
13 × 15 × 20 ft.  
Installation at Trinity Church, corner of Wall Street and Broadway,  
New York, New York, 2005–2015





TRINITY ROOT, 2005

Cast bronze

13 × 15 × 20 ft.

Installation at Trinity Church, corner of Wall Street and Broadway,  
New York, New York, 2005–2015



STEELROOT, 2008

Welded steel

50 × 35 × 40 ft.

Installation view of *Aerial Roots*, Grounds for Sculpture, Hamilton, New Jersey, 2012

FOLLOWING SPREAD

STEELROOT, 2011

Welded steel

21 × 19 × 34 ft.

Installation view of *Steelroots*, 4th Shanghai Jing'An International Sculpture Project (JISP), in front of the Shanghai Natural History Museum, Shanghai, China, 2016–2017





DETAIL OF STEELROOT  
Welded steel



STEELROOT, 2011

Welded steel

18 ft. × 12 ft. × 16 ft. 6 in.; 18 × 13 × 21 ft.; 20 × 10 × 16 ft.

Installation view of *Aerial Roots*, Grounds for Sculpture, Hamilton, New Jersey, 2012

FOLLOWING SPREAD

STEELROOT, 2007

Welded steel

10 ft. 6 in. × 12 ft. × 22 ft.

Installation view, Wuhan, China

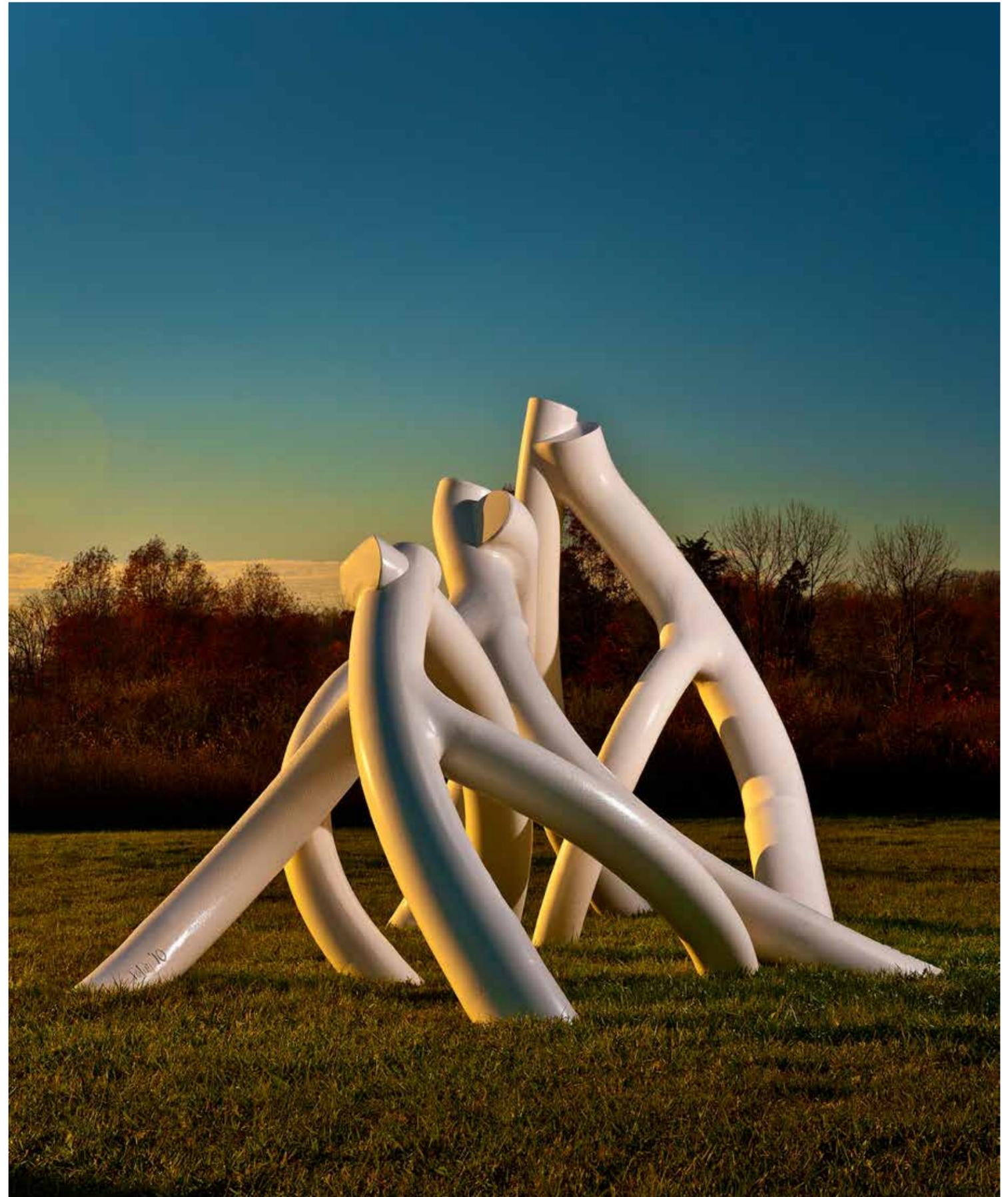




STEELROOT, 2009  
Welded steel  
15 × 15 × 18 ft.  
Installation view of *Steelroots*, Allentown Art Museum,  
Allentown, Pennsylvania, 2010



STEELROOT, 2011  
Welded steel  
10 × 17 × 11 ft.



STEELROOT, 2009

Welded steel

12 ft. 8 in. × 12 ft. 6 in. × 20 ft.

FOLLOWING SPREAD

Bending steel, John L. Lutz Welding & Fabrication, Frenchtown, New Jersey, 2012





STEELROOT, 2008

Welded steel

50 × 35 × 40 ft.

Installation view of *Exposed: The Secret Life of Roots*, United States Botanic Gardens,  
Washington, D.C., 2015–2016



Steve Tobin fabricating a *Steelroot*, Prodex, Inc., Red Hill, Pennsylvania, 2007

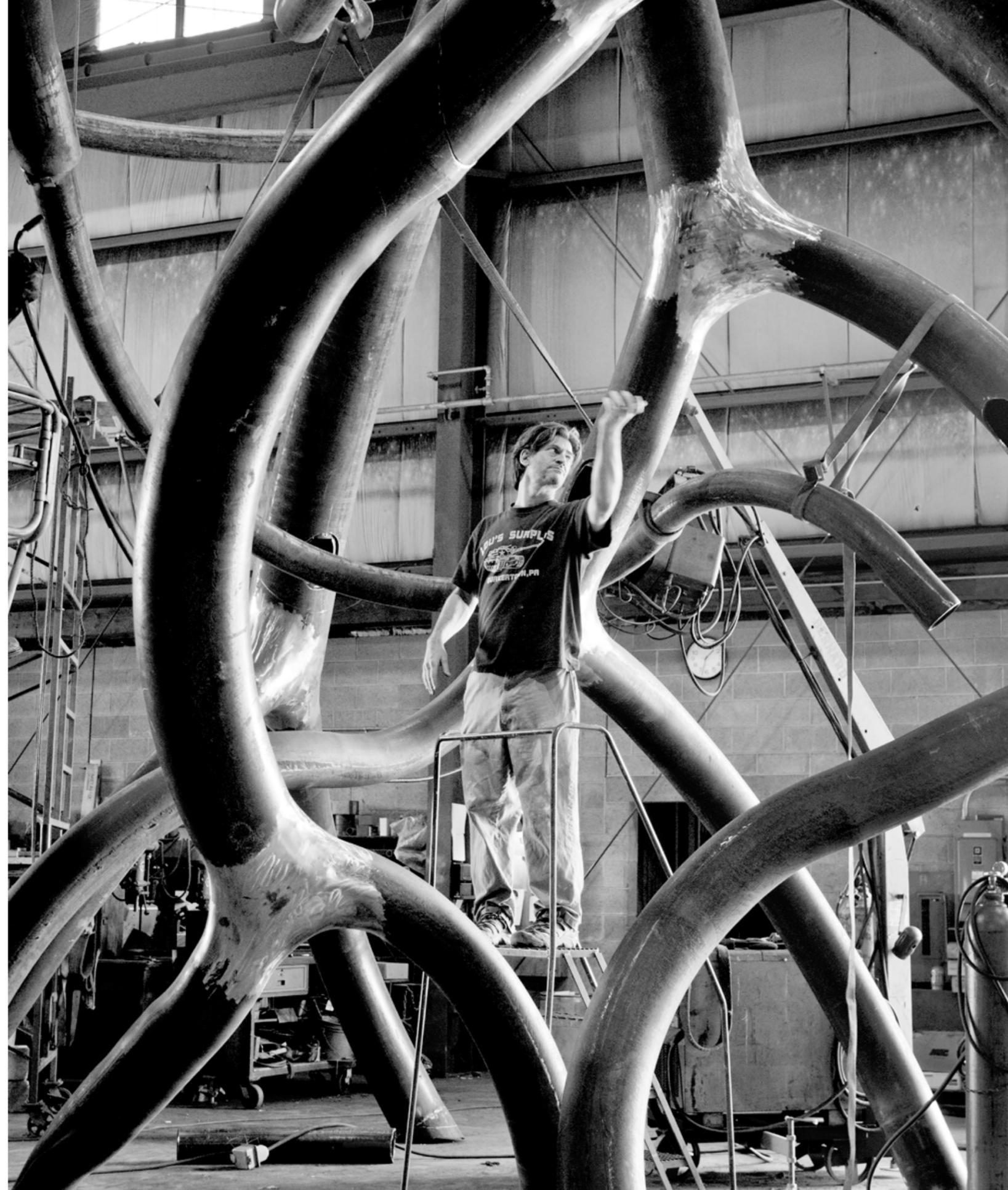
FOLLOWING SPREAD

STEELROOT, 2013

Welded steel

21 × 19 × 34 ft.

Installation view of *Steelroots*, 4th Shanghai Jing'An International Sculpture Project (JISP), in front of the Shanghai Natural History Museum, Shanghai, China, 2016–2017







PREVIOUS SPREAD

STEELROOT, 2013

Welded steel

25 × 20 × 30 ft.

Installation view of *Steve Tobin: Southern Roots* at Cheekwood Estate and Gardens,  
Nashville, Tennessee, 2016–2017

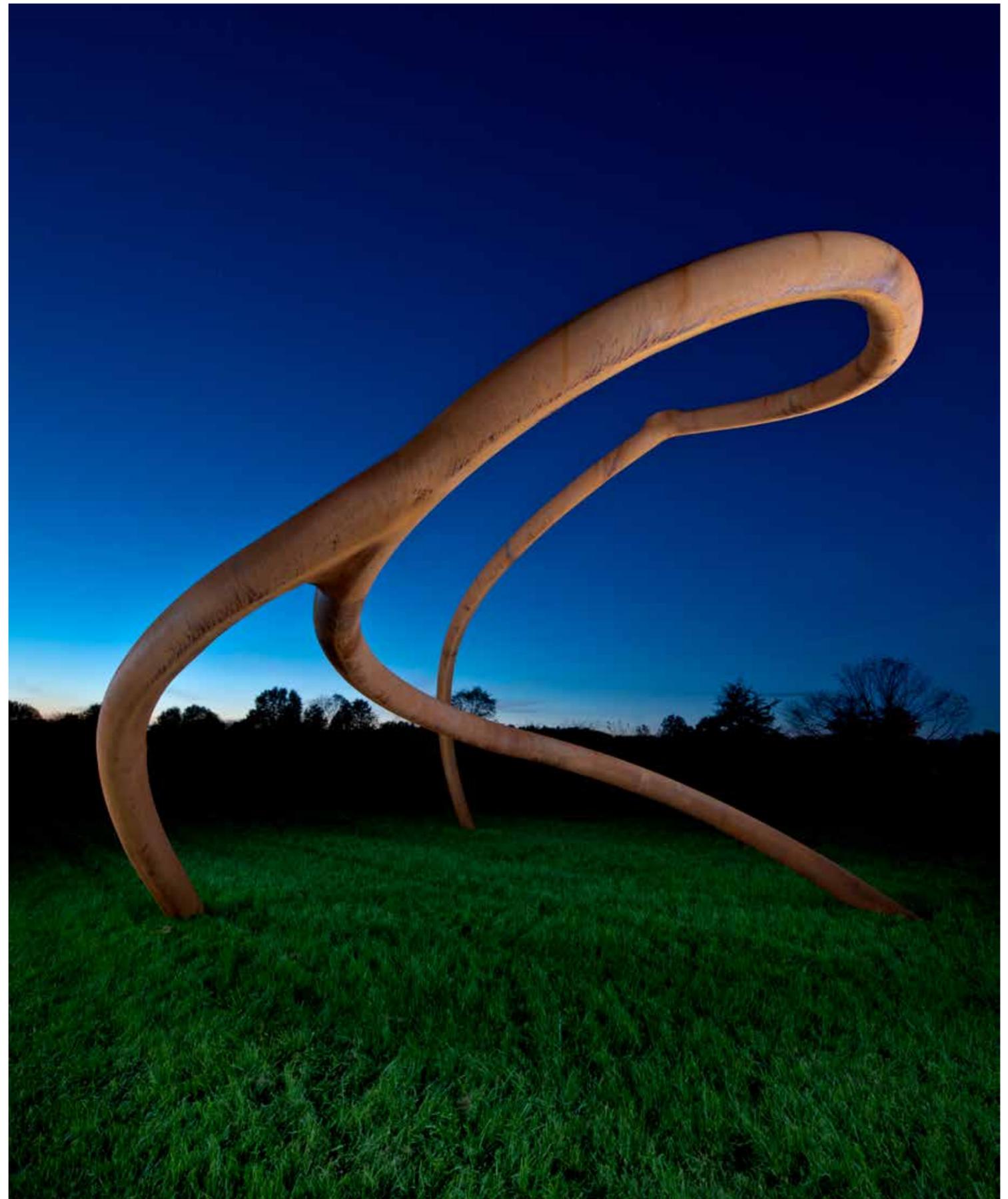
STEELROOT, 2010

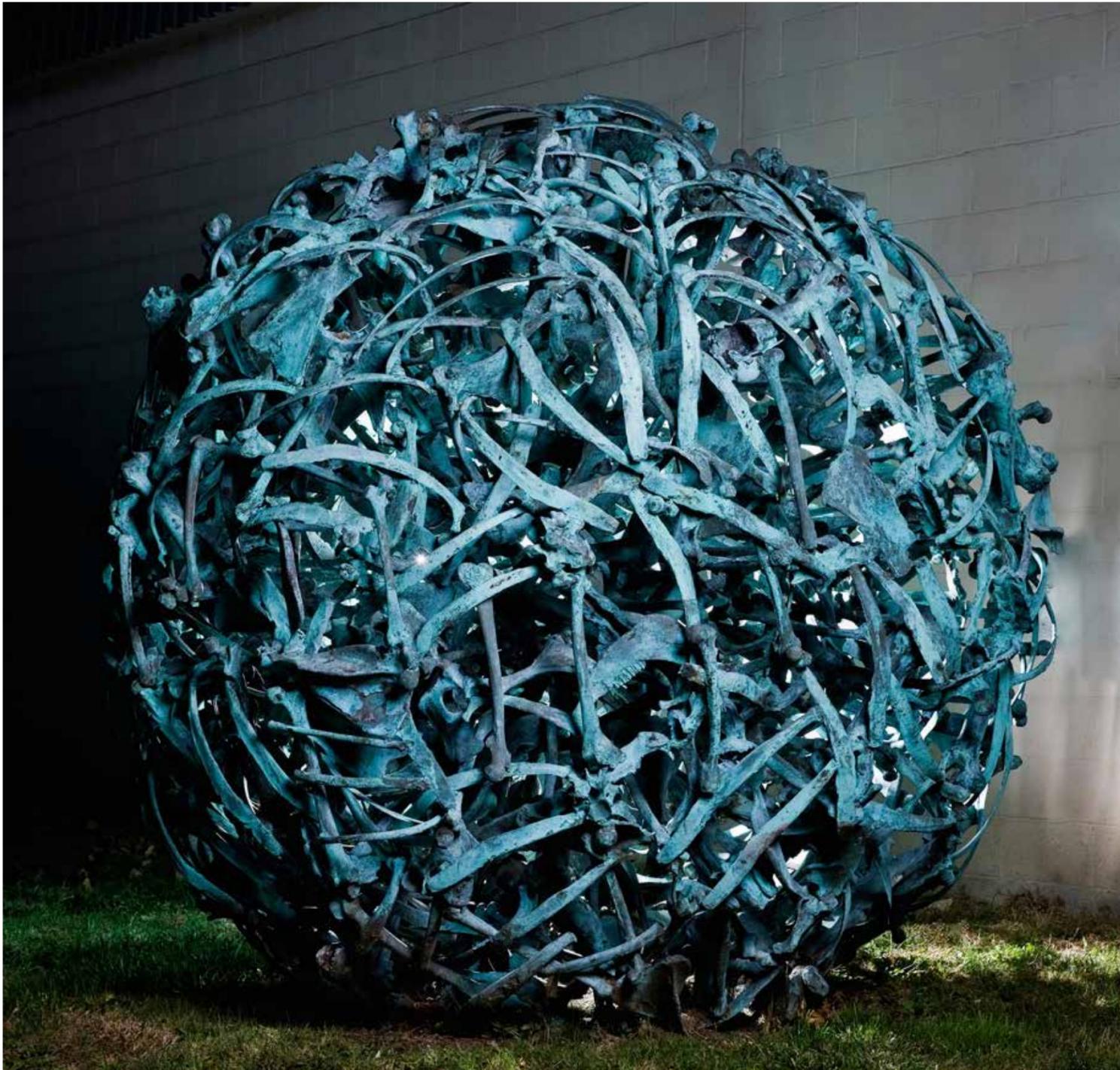
Welded steel

32 × 28 × 30 ft.



STEELROOT, 2009  
Welded steel  
23 × 24 × 40 ft.





BONEBALL, 2005  
Cast bronze  
(from cow and  
buffalo bones)  
96 × 96 × 96 in.

## Nature as Crucible

PHOEBE HOBAN

In my beginning is my end. . . .  
Old stone to new building, old timber to new fires,  
Old fires to ashes, and ashes to the earth  
Which is already flesh, fur and faeces,  
Bone of man and beast, cornstalk and leaf.

—T. S. ELIOT, “FOUR QUARTETS: EAST COKER”

For Steve Tobin, nature itself is the ultimate creative crucible. Tobin’s art, which ranges across a remarkable breadth of media, including glass, clay, bronze, and steel, is bound together by one unifying principle: nature as creative force. Tobin is a maverick at manipulating materials by harnessing nature’s dynamics, from the physical impact of an explosion to the delicate design cast by shadows. He has also mastered the art of appropriating nature’s templates—sometimes literally, as in his *Earth Bronzes*, other times figuratively, as in his *Steelroots*. Tobin puts it simply: “My work is about nature and I use nature to create my work.”

In an age when most contemporary artists use technology as a primary component of their art, whether as a fabrication tool or in its formal content, Tobin remains an anomaly. But the sixty-one-year-old artist is anything but retro. The sculptor, who studied mathematics and physics rather than art, has invented highly innovative techniques that utilize nature’s inherent power and intricate patterns to create art forms that are uniquely his own.

Over a decade ago, the artist coined a term for his work that still aptly applies: “visual science.”<sup>1</sup> Tobin’s art is as much about process as product. It channels the invisible or discarded in the physical world, manifesting it as artifact. Much of his work ingeniously documents the process of its own creation: art as recorded event. Thus the material process itself and the product of that process are inextricably and aesthetically merged. In its beginning is its end: the art and the artifact are synonymous.

As the artist himself expresses it, “I look at Jackson Pollock, who created an event—dripping paint—that went from his mind through his arm. His work was essentially the *event* of the material;

1. Anei Wallach, “Back to Nature,” *Smithsonian*, June 2004, 124–25.

the artwork itself encapsulates the event. The same is true for my art: the event is my guiding force. As you digress from the event, through observation, analysis, interpretation, impression, you move further and further away from the truth.” To Tobin, “The object is a souvenir. The event itself is the only truth.”

Tobin’s trajectory—the evolution of his visual science—has its own innate logic. Born in Philadelphia, Tobin is the son of a second-generation clothing manufacturer (Fishman & Tobin, known for their children’s apparel—Tobin recalled tagging clothes at the factory) and a mother with an orchid-growing hobby. Both parents graduated from the University of Pennsylvania. By Tobin’s own account, he was always something of an outsider (in both senses of the word). When he was seven years old, his family moved to Villanova, Pennsylvania, a rural area full of woods and wildlife. Nature became his escape route.

As a boy, Tobin found refuge in a backyard tree house built by his father, cooking on a bonfire beneath the oaks; later he sought solitude in the woods. “I felt more in harmony with nature. . . . Nature is not as rigid. . . . I was conversing with the birds and the butterflies. I was sleeping in the woods. They call it antisocial,” the artist told journalist Amei Wallach in 2004.<sup>2</sup> Today he says, “I was very much involved with nature from the earliest age, emotionally, intellectually, and in terms of curiosity. And that turned into an interest in science. I could see patterns in nature and that led me into math and physics.”

Tobin first started experimenting with glass at about thirteen years old, going into Philadelphia to buy laboratory tubes, which he blew into small objects that he sold in Greenwich Village. He first encountered a potter’s wheel at age fifteen, showing a natural aptitude and gaining a high level of craft from his teacher at the local high school, William Latina. A year later he began studying physics, and in 1975, he was selected to be a research assistant to Dr. Campbell Laird at the University of Pennsylvania. There he worked on lab experiments where “I learned to inflict events on metal,” an experience that served as an epiphany and a lifelong influence.

Tobin attended Tulane University, attracted by access to its electron microscope. He also took a ceramics class. He graduated in 1979, earning a degree in theoretical mathematics. He continued to pursue his interest in ceramics, competing and showing in statewide contests. In 1978, Tobin began what might be considered the first phase of his art career: he helped Gene Koss, Tulane’s ceramics professor, build a glass studio. By the following year, he had moved to North Carolina and built his own glass studio. Before long he was showing work at the Heller Gallery in New York City. To further his glassblowing technique, Tobin took classes at Pilchuck Glass School in Washington and North Carolina’s Penland School of Crafts.

Moving to Check, Virginia, he built a second glass studio and had his first solo show at Spring Street Enamels in New York. He later taught glassblowing at several institutions, including Penland, Pilchuck, the New York Experimental Glass Workshop, and Colorado Mountain College.

In 1985, Tobin had another experience that became a major formative influence: he was invited to teach glass sculpture at Tokyo Glass Art Institute. He learned Japanese, and his interest in calligraphy, clearly evident in his *Steelroots* sculpture, began there. By now, Tobin’s skill at glassblowing enabled him to push the envelope on the material. The work for which he first became known was a series of huge (five to fifteen feet) blown-glass *Cocoons*, which in 1988 were shown at Philadelphia’s Moore College of Art and Design (despite the fact that Corning engineers told Tobin that it was impossible to blow glass that big). The *Cocoon* series led to a unique invitation a year later to build his own glass studio in Murano, Italy, where the Venetians, world-class glassblowers, sought to learn his unorthodox technique. Says Tobin, “I designed equipment so that I could work in glass at any scale.”



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2. Wallach, “Back to Nature,” 126–27.

The *Cocoons* were game changers, both in terms of their size and their technical bravura. Suspended from the ceiling of a chapel in Belgium, or supported within a skeletal metal armature, the elegant, elongated *Cocoons* have an otherworldly, ethereal quality; Tobin describes them as “the spirit caged in the body.”

But the *Cocoons* became a turning point: Tobin realized that his real interest was not in craft, which he had clearly mastered, but in ideas. The artist began his deliberate career-long journey away from craftsmanship, from showing his hand. “I had a lot of virtuosity with my hands, and when you look at it you see virtuosity, and virtuosity is not content. It’s like seeing a beautiful woman: she may have content but you are blinded by the beauty. And beauty, if not intended as part of the content, can be a distraction. And the glass had so much of its own character that it contributed irrelevant beauty to the content. I’m trying to move further and further away from my hands. Because how profound is virtuosity when you are dealing with ideas?”

Tobin stopped blowing glass, although he still continued to use the material in startling ways. He began his cast-glass *Door* series, tomb-shaped backlit slabs that he created by throwing shards of colored glass into the furnace at deliberate angles and then allowing the nature of fluid dynamics to take its course, occasionally “stirring the cauldron” to enhance the turbulence. The resulting pieces, with their molten, marbled patterning, suggest melted stained-glass windows. In 1993, they were shown to great effect in Retretti, Finland, in an underground cave, along with Tobin’s *Cocoons* and *Waterglass*.

The *Waterglass* series consists of glass capillary tubes, which Tobin tosses like pickup sticks, creating a glittering mass that shimmers, waterlike, with changes in light. These artworks are a dazzling sleight of hand—according to Tobin, “magic is a big part of my work.” His first *Waterglass* piece was a “river” he installed in the woods in New Jersey, baffling hikers who came across it by chance. In the early 1990s he showed cascading *Waterglass* pieces in Rouen, France, West Palm Beach, and a hundred-foot-long glass “river” that ran among boulders in Finland. Using the same technique, he also created several *Water Columns*, one of which was shown at the American Craft Museum in New York, dramatically spanning its staircase. Tobin plans to return to the series, this time using thin metal tubes instead of glass.

After the *Waterglass* series, Tobin “retired” from glass. He turned to metal as his next medium, building a bronze foundry in 1994 that enabled him to cast his several-part *Earth Bronze* series, which began with the *Forest Floor* pieces and ended with *Bronze Roots*.

In the extraordinary *Forest Floor* pieces, Tobin’s early lab experience with heating and cooling metals merges seamlessly with his lifelong love of nature, enabling him to transform patches of the forest floor—or for that matter assemblages of fish, bread, or cornstalks—into bronze reliefs, faithfully cast, down to the last twig, berry, and stem. In their use of artfully assembled vegetation or foodstuffs, these massive pieces, shaped like doors, are reminiscent of Giuseppe Arcimboldo. But Tobin isn’t simply emulating or copying nature: through the alchemy of his sophisticated casting process, which uses high temperatures and a specially fortified ceramic mold, he has actually turned the patch of earth into bronze. The bronze is then coated with multiple layers of patina that can take up to twelve weeks to apply.

“Everything is an experiment,” the artist says. “Most artists go to a professional foundry, and that influences the outcome of their work. I develop processes that let the physical materials do what they should do.” To every extent possible, the earth patch is replicated precisely, although minor adjustments might be made in terms of moving a twig or leaf. Tobin’s artistic choice comes into play when selecting the palette of the patina, making a mulberry blue instead of green. The



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finished *Forest Floor* works are “not as they were, but as they might have been,” he says. For the artist, they are an effort to re-envision “things that are discarded or that we dismiss because they are familiar. They came about from my walking in the woods and seeing light hit a certain patch of ground, so I am trying to re-create that magic moment for others. By moving the earth slab from horizontal to vertical, transforming its geometry into an arc, and translating it from one material to another, you no longer see it as it was. It enables you to see the earth again for the first time. So, in a sense, it becomes a magical doorway back into the earth.”

The *Earth Bronze* series next evolved into Tobin’s monumental *Termite Hills*, which, like the *Forest Floor* pieces, were shown at OK Harris in 1998. Two years later, they were also installed in the park at the American Museum of Natural History and at Montefiore Park in the Bronx, attracting a fair amount of attention. As Roberta Smith wrote in the *New York Times*, “They are cast-bronze sculptures of the spectacular termite anthills found in Ghana. Over six feet high, they resemble the mountains in Chinese landscape painting and from a distance seem to be the color of red earth; up close, a subtle rainbow of patinas streak their surfaces.”<sup>3</sup>

Tobin’s *Termite Hills*, which can range up to fifteen feet high, are in a class by themselves. They originated from a trip he took to Ghana to visit an assistant. Astonished by the intricacy of these craggy, conical natural forms, he devoted a huge amount of personal resources—time, energy and money—to turn them into sculpture. First he hired local villagers in Ghana to make rubber molds of vacant termite hills, which he then shipped home and cast in bronze. The resulting pieces, with their drip-like forms, resemble Antoni Gaudí’s architecture, or miniaturized versions of the red-hued lava formations found in the American Southwest. They are neither organic nor man-made: they perfectly exemplify Tobin’s process-oriented transmutation of nature into artifact, and achieve his goal of creating art that is removed from the artist’s hand.

Tobin is interested not only in material but in scale, and as his work has evolved, many of his processes have incorporated efforts to push scale to its furthest limits. Tobin’s *Bronze Roots*, which he began in 1999, are the final works in his *Earth Bronze* series. Like the *Forest Floors* and the *Termite Hills*, they are organic elements of nature that Tobin has transformed into sculpture by casting them in bronze. These large-scale works—some thirty feet in diameter—can take up to two hundred separate castings to create, since they are made in individual pieces that are welded together before being coated with an iron-oxide patina.

Like Georg Baselitz’s paintings, famous for their upside-down imagery, Tobin has upended our conventional view of the world. Instead of the tree’s branches pointing towards the sky, he has boldly exposed its invisible nether part—the roots that anchor it to earth. The trees, which at first glance seem inverted, look like alien insects, supported by multiple tentacles or legs. Large enough to walk through, getting lost among the shadows, they are among his most ambitious works. With the *Bronze Roots*, which he now fabricates in steel, Tobin feels that he has reached his apotheosis, creating the work that will be his legacy.

The most celebrated of this series is his *Trinity* sculpture, created from the roots of a seventy-year-old sycamore that was toppled by the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and in falling, helped shield the venerable St. Paul’s Church from further destruction. Tobin and his assistants took the tree’s stump and its roots—which measured eighteen feet high and twenty-five feet wide—and cast them in bronze, covering them in a blood-red patina made directly from the detritus of the attack. “The patina is made of the DNA and the dirt from Ground Zero. So when you touch the piece you’re touching the event of 9/11,” the artist has said.<sup>4</sup> Tobin went out of his way to use a process that didn’t damage the original remains of the tree, which were preserved as a relic and returned to St. Paul’s churchyard.

3. Roberta Smith, “Creativity Overhead, Underfoot and Even in the Air,” *New York Times*, July 27, 2001, 25.



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4. Thomas Connors, *Steve Tobin: Aerial Roots* (Hamilton, New Jersey: Grounds for Sculpture, 2012), 11.

The resulting sculpture—a potent ode to an heroic tree—looked like an enormous piece of coral, towering yet oddly delicate, that was somehow beached in lower Manhattan. It also, poignantly, evoked severed veins and arteries. The sculpture was placed in the courtyard of Trinity Church in 2005, where it remained until 2015, when, unbeknownst to Tobin, Trinity Church shipped it to its Connecticut retreat. In the process, the artwork—meant to be a permanent installation—was badly damaged, according to Tobin, who sued Trinity Church in 2017 and lost; the decision has been appealed.

But even before the tragic monument’s sad denouement, Tobin had decided to leave bronze behind. He also left behind his Pleasant Valley, Pennsylvania, studio, in which he had worked since 1986, moving to an immense factory-sized space in an industrial park in Quakertown, Pennsylvania, in 2004, where he still currently works. He was not, however, abandoning either metal as a material or roots as a subject. In transitioning to steel from bronze, Tobin dramatically transformed the basic root, as it were, of his practice: “Working in steel, taking geometric elements and breathing life into every inch of them, rather than appropriating life, I moved from naturalist to modernist. It doesn’t sound like much, going from making roots in bronze to making roots in steel, but naturalism is the domination of nature over man, and modernism is the domination of man over nature.”<sup>5</sup>

By allowing himself to reinsert his artist’s hand, Tobin began to create works that “ironically, by not casting directly from dead roots . . . are much more alive,” he has said.<sup>6</sup> While still suggestive of roots and branches, the steel pieces are, by intention, abstract, and, in their pared-down shapes and forms, the closest Tobin comes to Minimalism. Their fluid geometry gracefully ranges from spare to serpentine.

Huge but elastic-looking, the *Steelroots*, some of which resemble vastly expanded versions of the calligraphy Tobin admired in Japan, are expansively choreographed works, designed both to stand on their own and also to visually interact with their immediate surroundings—either natural or urban. “My challenge is to create forms that control the space underneath and past and around the piece. I am trying to activate the space, as much space as possible, not just the physical area that it occupies, but beyond,” he has said.<sup>7</sup> The *Steelroots* house space—you can stand inside them. Their sweeping curves also frame their environment, whether it is a view of trees or of skyscrapers. Wherever they stand, they are innately site-specific.

Fabricated from discarded steel pipes with irregular surfaces, the *Steelroots* create a wonderful sense of movement, as if they are dancing on the earth. Tobin describes a bone-white piece, which, with its sinuous Y-shaped legs and embracing arm, clearly suggests a pair of dancing partners, as a reference to Claes Oldenburg’s *Clothespin*, which itself is a reference to Constantin Brancusi’s *The Kiss*. Tobin has likened the joints in these sculptures to a dancer’s hands, with their gestures defining the next movement. “I consider all the cut ends like hands, and the angle at which I cut them will imply a movement, activating the space beyond the physical steel,” he has said.<sup>8</sup>

Tobin cites Alexander Calder as an influence, and the streamlined *Steelroots* are meant to convey continuous motion. Despite their monumental size, they are not static; they constantly change, activated by light, shadow and their surroundings. “That’s what keeps them alive,” the artist says. “It is not just the formal shape. I spent days making these pieces at different times, so I was composing the shadows.” According to Tobin, it is the play of light on both the metal’s uneven patina and its curvilinear armature that imbue the works with spirit. “I learned from working with glass how to animate things with light,” he says. That animation is perfectly embodied by the cathedral-like arches in some pieces, creating a nimbus of light within their vaulted space. These sculptures, like much of Tobin’s work, are as much about the invisible as the visible.

5. Connors, *Steve Tobin: Aerial Roots*, 12.

6. Connors, *Steve Tobin: Aerial Roots*, 12.



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7. Connors, *Steve Tobin: Aerial Roots*, 15.

8. Connors, *Steve Tobin: Aerial Roots*, 15.



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9. John Perreault, "Steve Tobin, Ideas and Theater," *Ceramics Monthly*, March, 2001, 61.

Throughout the time Tobin was working on the *Roots* in both bronze and steel, he was also experimenting with yet another medium, clay, which he approached in a totally novel fashion: he detonated it. The extraordinary *Exploded Earth* pieces beautifully express Tobin's fundamental modus operandi: the synthesis of process and product, art and artifact. While they overlap both the *Bronze* and *Steelroots*, they also, in part, bring his trajectory full circle. To create these works, which range in size from miniature to galactic, Tobin literally mimics the "Big Bang," by planting a fire-work or stick of dynamite in a cube of clay, thus creating an event that turns the clay itself into its own pottery wheel. "I see the exploded clay works as created in much the same way as the universe was created," he told John Perreault in 2001. "The 'Bang Pots' [as he called them then] function as little universes."<sup>9</sup>

As Tobin puts it now, "It is the same physics that creates galaxies or volcanoes or hot springs. I've translated an explosion into form. And I've documented a movement. These are a document of a movement from order to chaos." They are also a movement from a cube of clay to a beautiful object, even if Tobin still regards them as "souvenirs" resulting from an "event." At their largest, the resulting pieces look like enormous naturally occurring geodes; smaller, they resemble artful Japanese teacups or bud vases. In both sizes, the exploded clay reveals a glittering interior pattern of crystalline glass, ranging from emerald to violet.

While the explosive's natural dynamics create the object, Tobin's hand comes into play three times. First he imprints the surface of the clay cube with textured patterns from found objects, ranging from cut crystal to the screen from a photography light to Italian broccoli. Next, he places the explosive in the clay, leaving the rest to the physics of the event. After an exploded clay piece has dried for a year, he inserts clear glass into its center, which during the firing process picks up the gemlike colors of the metal oxides in the clay.

The artist intervenes a final time when he creates the glaze for each piece, dusting the porcelain clay with bronze powder and glass dust before it goes into the kiln. "They are embarrassingly beautiful," he says of the finished works. "They are not supposed to be pottery-beautiful. There are also some very interesting formal qualities, in that you have a sphere invading a cube, which is a wonderful modernist element. It's a partnership between me, culture, and nature. They are never what I intend—they are always better."

What Tobin calls the "what if" factor applies to this series, which can vary from imploded (concave) to exploded (peeling outward like the petals of a flower) depending on how much explosive he uses and what angle it is positioned at. "It's like in mathematics," he told journalist Amei Wallach, after detonating a three-thousand-pound piece of clay. "What happens in the smallest case? What happens in the largest case?"<sup>10</sup> Ultimately, he has said, he would like to make *Exploded Earth* pieces big enough to walk into.

Tobin is attracted to spaces that can be entered. He has already created a number of such works, including both his *Roots* series, as well as a trio of odd little "shelters": *Adobe* (1994), *Matzoh House* (1996), and *Lantern House* (2001). There is nothing conventionally religious in Tobin's work. Indeed, it is more akin to paganism, in its nature worship, and pantheism, in its celebration of the creative power of the universe. Still, some of his pieces can be seen or experienced as sanctuaries—chapel-like contemplative spaces. They may also be an unconscious throwback to his childhood tree house. (As his *Roots* were subliminally suggested by the trees where he found early refuge.)

Two of these shelters are made of glass. (While it resembles a shelter, his 1992 glass *Tepee* intentionally has no entrance—a metaphor for space stolen from Native Americans.) *Adobe* is one of Tobin's more political works. This igloo-shaped piece was created out of almost one thousand

10. Wallach, "Back to Nature," 129.

unused M-60 bullet-resistant tank windows that were welded together, leaving a circular opening on its top and a diamond-shaped door in its side. From the outside, it looks like a shiny glass beehive. To enhance its military aspect, Tobin and his assistants fired shells into panes, some of which, unspent, are still embedded in the windows. The shells shattered portions of the glass, leaving jagged formations redolent of the violence the tanks were designed to inflict. The view from inside *Adobe* is thus seen through fractured glass. Like the best of Tobin's work, it brings in the external environment and exploits the changing beauty of natural light.

Both are made of discarded materials, but in contrast to the somewhat brutal aspect of *Adobe*, *Lantern House* is pure magic. It is, in fact, a large-scale magic lantern shaped like a house, composed of more than one thousand old glass slides, from slides of ancient art and children's textbook pages to slides of blood, culled from libraries where they had been shelved unseen for years. *Lantern House* is illuminated from within, so that inside, a viewer can closely examine the exquisitely encyclopedic slides, while outside, their multiple images are projected onto the surrounding area. Tobin also made a much smaller version of this delightful digression.

The earlier *Matzoh House* is a somber sculpture designed to memorialize both the exodus of the Jews from Egypt and their genocide during the Holocaust. It is made of thousands of pieces of matzoh, the unleavened bread the Jews baked for their flight. The sheets of matzoh crackers have been cast in bronze. Their perforations are the crack through which the light gets in, as Leonard Cohen put it. ("There is a crack, a crack in everything / That's how the light gets in.") Once again, as true artists do, Tobin has merged the apparently ordinary with the sublime.

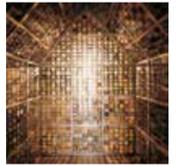
Throughout his career, Tobin has used the forces of nature to create art that both celebrates nature and goes beyond it. At this juncture, he plans, quite literally, to expand his vision. He would, for instance, like to double the scale of his *Steelroots* pieces and reinvent his cascading *Water Column* works in skyscraper-tall rivulets of steel.

"My future involves scaling up," the artist says. "I want to make a piece that will become the heart of a city. Imagine a hundred-foot dancing root between two buildings in New York or Tokyo—two building-sized, romantic figures, like Root gods that make the whole city dance!" Going further, he envisions the "*Steelwaters* filling a multistoried building from floor to ceiling, with an impossible silent cascade, a tsunami of art as implied force of nature."

Then, in an uncharacteristic acknowledgment of his own decades-long outpouring of extraordinary art, Tobin declares, "That tsunami is me."



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Tobin Studio in Quakertown, Pennsylvania, 2018

## Chronology

**1957** Born Steven Robert Tobin on February 10 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to Frances Emmanuel and Sylvan Morton Tobin.

**1970** Growing up on Philadelphia's Main Line, Tobin attends the Haverford School between grades seven and nine. Engages in early experimentations in glass by making laboratory apparatus for physics experiments.

**1972** Attends Harriton High School in Rosemont, Pennsylvania, in whose art department he is introduced to the potter's wheel. Begins serious study of saxophone with famed saxophonist Arthur Hegvik.

**1973** Begins studying physics, transferring his fascination with the natural world to the theoretical world. Physics, art, and music become interweaving passions.

**1975** Is selected in a citywide search for post of research assistant to the physicist Dr. Campbell Laird, who is conducting a six-month experiment on the structure of matter at the University of Pennsylvania. The experiment involves growing crystals in metal, polishing them, and studying their formations under an electron microscope.

**1976** Enrolls in Tulane University in New Orleans, Louisiana, because the school has an electron microscope available to undergraduate students and a strong music department. Takes a ceramics course.

**1977** Tobin's interest in ceramics increases, and he begins exhibiting work in statewide exhibitions. Travels to Central America and visits many pottery factories and studios.

**1978** Assists Gene Koss, ceramics and glass professor at Tulane University, in building a glass studio. Develops unique glassblowing techniques and his work is chosen for traveling museum exhibitions. Assists ceramicist Peter Voukos at a ceramics workshop at Tulane. Meets Christo at a workshop and is impressed by his large-scale fabrication process and collaboration with the environment. Starts exhibiting ceramic and glass works in statewide and national competitions.

**1979** Graduates with bachelor's degree in theoretical mathematics from Tulane University. Attends Pilchuck Glass School in Washington State and Penland School of Crafts in North Carolina. Moves to North Carolina, builds glass studio, and begins showing work at Heller Gallery in New York.

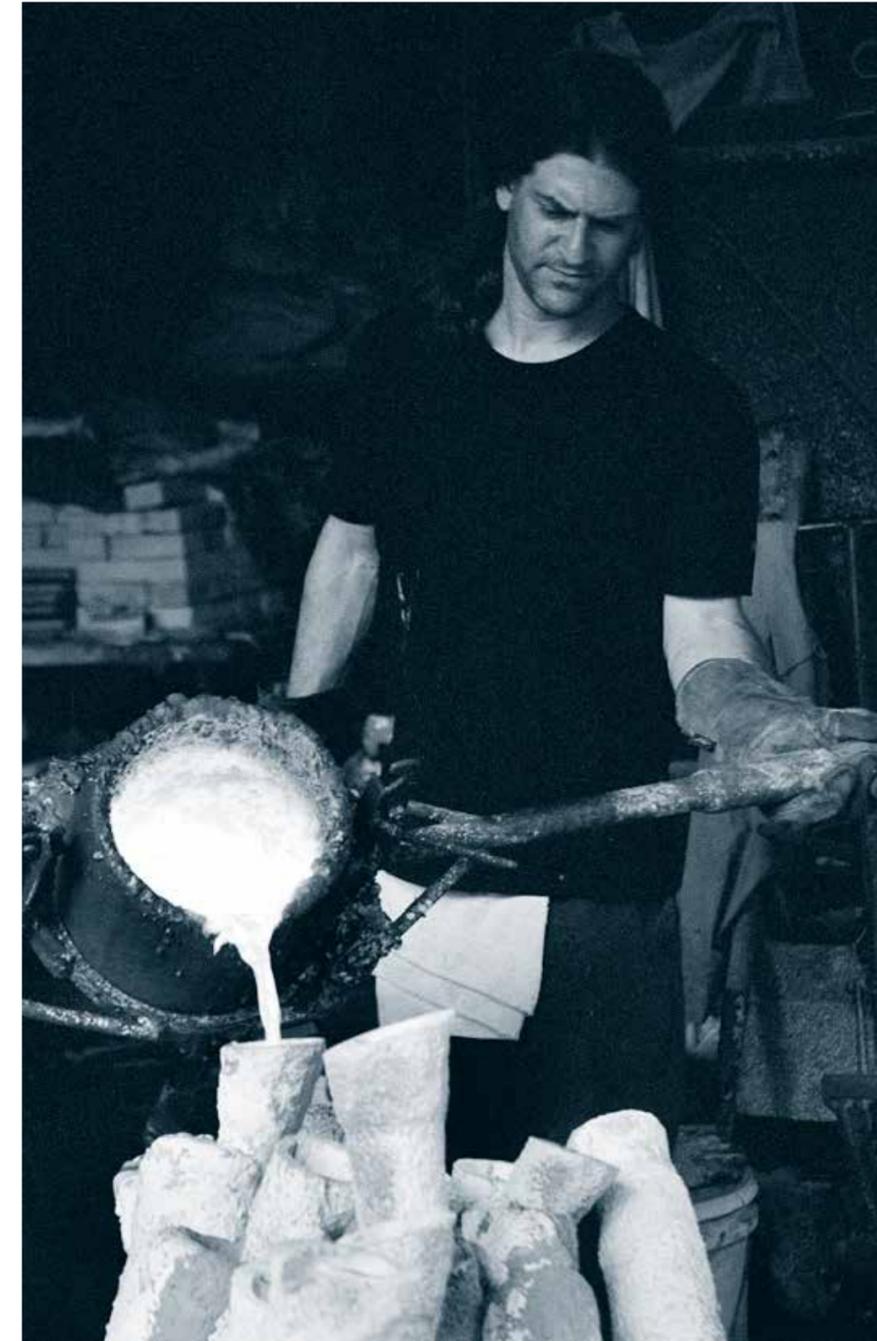
**1982** Leaves studio in Virginia to broaden scope. Returns to Pilchuck and Penland as a teaching assistant. Teaches at the New York Experimental Glass Workshop (now UrbanGlass) in New York and Colorado Mountain College.

**1983–1984** Receives the inaugural seven-month fellowship at Wheaton Village (now Wheaton Arts and Cultural Center) in Millville, New Jersey, where he formulates the foundation of many concepts for future glass work. Makes first large-scale outdoor installation, *Waterglass*, a "glass river," in Millville. Is invited to blow glass at the Seguso Vetri d'Arte in Murano, Italy, to demonstrate innovative techniques.

**1985–1986** When invited to teach glass sculpture at Tokyo Glass Art Institute, is profoundly impacted by Japanese culture and arts, particularly brush-drawn calligraphy and the ceramic vessels of the tea ceremony. Conceives of process to blow glass on a large scale and moves back to the United States to realize monumental glass works.

**1988** Invents a process that permits him to create installation-scale blown-glass works. Creates fifteen-foot-tall blown-glass *Cocoons*. First exhibition of Tobin's *Cocoons* at Moore College of Art and Design in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

**1989** Becomes the first foreign artist to build his own glass studio in Murano, Italy, and his furnace designs are copied by several Murano factories. Exhibits his groundbreaking large-scale blown glass *Cocoons* in Europe and the United States. The *Cocoons* exhibited in Venice appear on his first cover of the international glass magazine *Neues Glas – New Glass: art & architecture*.



Steve Tobin pouring bronze, Pleasant Valley, Pennsylvania, 2005

**1990** Begins working in cast glass with bronze, developing an innovative process of casting bronze and glass together in the same mold. Installs the thirty-foot-high blown-glass mobile *Ascension* in a Baroque chapel in Antwerp. Begins the *Doors* series.

**1992** Lands second cover of *Neues Glas – New Glass: art & architecture* magazine with three-story-high *Waterglass*, exhibited at the international glass installations show in Espace Duchamp-Villon in Rouen, France. Installs *Water Column* at the American Craft Museum (now the Museum of Arts and Design) in New York. The piece is reviewed by Roberta Smith in the *New York Times*. Installs the twenty-nine-foot-tall *Tepee* on his property in Pleasant Valley, Pennsylvania.

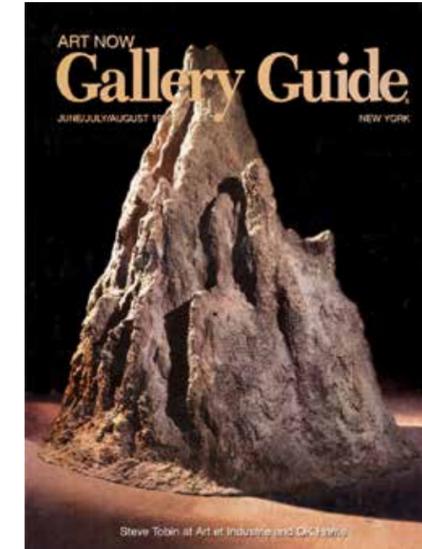
**1993** Has first retrospective at Retretti Art Centre in Finland; the exhibition is paired with an exhibition of Marc Chagall's works. Publishes *Retretti*, which documents his installation in the venue's twenty-nine-thousand-square-foot underground caverns. Records and releases album *Retretti Cave Songs* to accompany the exhibition. Blows world's largest bottle (193 gallons) for charity event supporting Wheaton Village, Millville, New Jersey; this feat is included in the *Guinness Book of World Records* in 1995. Retires from glass to pursue music.

**1994** Philip Berman, chairman of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, invites Tobin to join Anthony Caro's Triangle Artists' Workshop, a group of international metal and stone sculptors that Berman has sponsored to work in Allentown, Pennsylvania. *Praha*, Tobin's first metal piece, inspired by a visit to Prague's Old Jewish Cemetery, is featured in *Art in America*. Berman buys Tobin two hundred thousand pounds of steel—Berman's only instructions are to "make it grand." Constructed of one thousand M-60 tank windows and weighing twenty thousand pounds, *Adobe* is featured on the cover of *Glass* magazine. In reaction to practice of creating monumental works, begins a series in a more human-scaled dimension, *Squeeze*, in which Tobin squeezes hot wax and casts the negative space of the interior of his fist in bronze. Builds bronze foundry and begins to cast bronze.

**1995** Makes first large-scale metal sculpture, the thirty-foot-long *Bone Wall*. Publishes the catalogue *Steve Tobin: Reconstructions* with the Philip and Muriel Berman Museum of Art, Ursinus College, in Collegeville, Pennsylvania, documenting two years' work in metal.

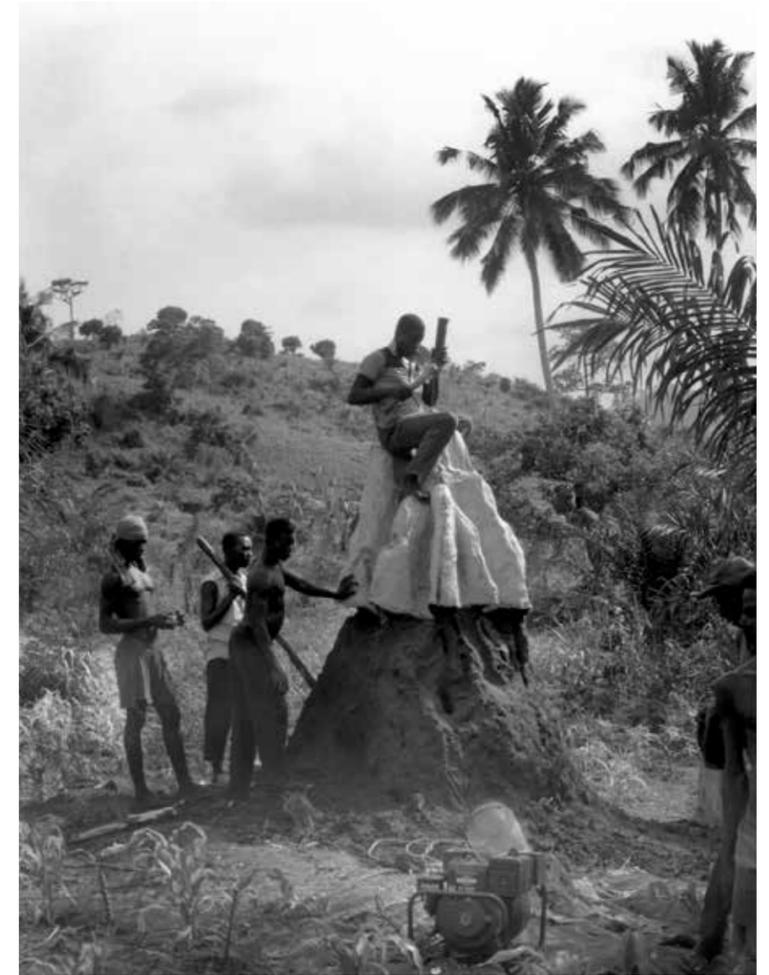
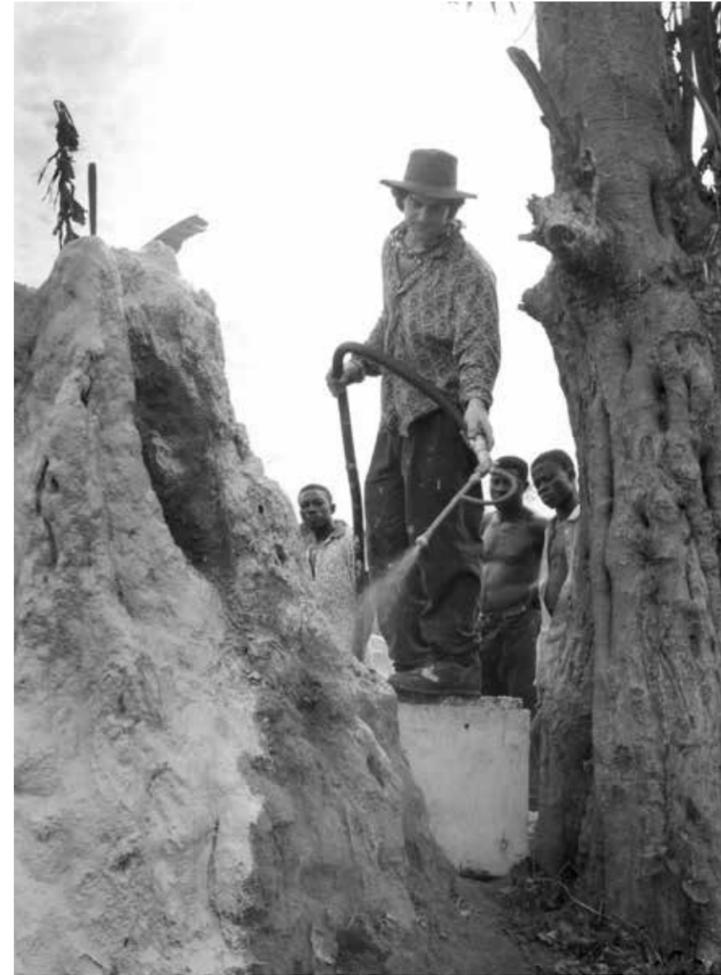
**1996** Begins *Earth Bronzes* series with *Forest Floor* bronzes, in which he casts sections of earth and forest detritus in bronze. Constructs *Matzoh House*, composed of thousands of individually bronzed matzohs.

**1996** Travels to Ghana, West Africa, to make bronze castings of termite hills.



OPPOSITE  
 Clockwise from top left: Cover, *Glass*, no. 65 (Winter 1996).  
 Cover, *Gallery Guide New York*, June/July/August 1998. *People*, June 29, 1998.

FOLLOWING SPREAD  
 Left page: The villagers of Nswam in Ghana working on a *Termite Hill*, 1997.  
 Right page (left): Steve Tobin molding a *Termite Hill* in the village of Nswam in Ghana, 1997.  
 Right page (right): The villagers of Nswam in Ghana working on a *Termite Hill*, 1997.





Left to right: *Newsweek*, November 6, 2000. *Smithsonian* 35, no. 3. (June 2004).

1998 Exhibits *Earth Bronzes* at the Fuller Craft Museum in Brockton, Massachusetts. The show travels to OK Harris Gallery in New York and is featured on the cover of *Gallery Guide New York*. *Termite Hills* is shown at Art et Industrie in New York. Both groundbreaking shows are reviewed in *Art in America*.

1999 Yearlong exhibition of *Earth Bronzes* installed at the American Museum of Natural History in New York, with an ancillary exhibition at Montefiore Park in West Harlem.

2000 Returns to clay with the *Exploded Earth* series, detonating explosives inside blocks of wet clay, creating sculptural forms. Tobin's *Roots* sculpture is the centerpiece of the Vancouver International Sculpture Project in Vancouver, British Columbia, and later in Kirkland, Washington.

2001 *Lantern House* is exhibited at the Marco Polo Gallery during the 49th Venice Biennale. It returns to the United States on September 10, 2001; also on that day the American Museum of Natural History exhibition is de-installed. After the terrorist attacks on September 11, Tobin hears about the old sycamore tree across the street from the World Trade Center that "saved St. Paul's Chapel" during the attack; he visits the site with manager Kathleen Rogers to meet with Father Lyndon Harris, the pastor at St. Paul's, to discuss turning the fallen tree into a bronze memorial commemorating the profound loss and heroism on that fateful day.

2002 Major yearlong *Naked Earth* exhibition opens on the grounds of the George C. Page Museum at the La Brea Tar Pits, with an ancillary show at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, underwritten by Wolfgang Puck and Barbara Lazaroff. These are featured in *Newsweek* and the *Los Angeles Times*.

2003 Dr. James Cooper, the new rector of Trinity Church, gives permission to pick up the stump and root system of the sycamore tree still lying in the churchyard of St. Paul's Chapel and turn it into the first 9/11 memorial in lower Manhattan. The stump is moved to Tobin's California Road studio in Quakertown.

2004 Tobin's son, Noah, with partner Janet Hild, is born in Pleasant Valley, Pennsylvania.

2005 After more than one year and twenty-thousand man-hours to make *Trinity Root*, the dedication of the *Trinity Root* 9/11 memorial sculpture takes place on the four-year anniversary of the World Trade Center attack in the Trinity Church courtyard at the corner of Wall Street and Broadway, where it will stand as the only memorial for more than a decade, until the 9/11 Memorial and Museum opens at the site of Ground Zero in November 2014. Tobin moves from representational bronze roots to abstractions in steel in his *Steelroots* series. Begins large-scale multimedia paintings and is mentored by friend Robert Indiana.



Left to right: *National Geographic* 208, no.2 (August 2005). *New York Times*, July 6, 2005.



Left to right: Art in America, June/July 2006. New York Times, October 3, 2007.

- 2006 Monumental mixed-media *Paintings* exhibited at OK Harris Gallery in New York; the show is reviewed in *Art in America*.
- 2007 Exhibits white *Steelroots* in Prospect Park as part of the 40 Years of Art in the Parks citywide celebration of public art. Photographs of the work run in the *New York Post*, *New York Sun*, and *New York Times*.
- 2008 Twins Sienna and Milo, with partner Janet Hild, born in Pleasant Valley, Pennsylvania. *Shiroi sakura no neh* (White cherry blossom root), part of the *Steelroots* series, is commissioned as public art in Osaka, Japan.
- 2009 *Steelroots* becomes a permanent public installation in Calgary, Canada. Invited to demonstrate method of exploding clay as the American representative to the 5th World Ceramics Biennale, Icheon, South Korea.
- 2012 Tobin's dealer Ivan Karp dies. Tobin participates in the Burning Man festival in Nevada's Black Rock Desert with a large burning installation.
- 2013 Tobin's father, Sylvan Morton Tobin, dies.
- 2014 Begins working in wood in Costa Rica and United States.

- 2015 Exhibits forty-foot-tall *Steelroots* at the United States Botanic Gardens in Washington, D.C. Due to its popularity, the show is extended another year into 2016. *Trinity Root* is moved from the corner of Wall Street and Broadway to the Trinity Retreat Center, West Cornwall, Connecticut.
- 2016 Receives ArtsQuest Foundation Lifetime Achievement Award. Solo artist at the 4th Shanghai Jing'An International Sculpture Project (JISP) and keynote speaker. Donates a maquette of *Trinity Root* to the National September 11 Memorial Museum in New York City.
- 2017 Scales up the *Squeeze* series to a nine-foot-tall sculpture. Rebuilds *Adobe House* (1994) in the gardens of the W. Atlee Burpee Seed Company's historic Fordhook Farm in Doylestown, Pennsylvania.
- 2018 Interviewed for WHYY-TV's series *Articulate with Jim Cotter*, which is broadcast nationally on over one hundred public television markets including New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, San Francisco, and Washington D.C. Begins the *Steelwaters* series, utilizing steel to transform the *Glasswaters* series into a near-limitless array of scales and forms. *Steelwaters* installed at the 5th Shanghai Jing'An International Sculpture Project (JISP).



Left to right: New York Times, December 30, 2007. The Washington Post, June 8, 2015.



BONWALL, 2002  
 Cast bronze (from bones of  
 predators and their prey)  
 79½ in. × 11 ft. ×  
 (overall footprint) 57½ in.

## Exhibition History

### SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS AND INSTALLATIONS

2018 *Steelwaters*, 5th Shanghai Jing'An International Sculpture Project (JISP), Shanghai, China

2016–PRESENT San José Museum of Art, San José, California. Installation  
*Steve Tobin: Cocoon Awakenings*, Allentown Art Museum, Allentown, Pennsylvania

2016–2017 *Steve Tobin: Southern Roots*, Cheekwood Estate and Gardens, Nashville, Tennessee  
*Steelroots*, 4th Shanghai Jing'An International Sculpture Project (JISP), Shanghai, China

2015–2016 *Exposed: The Secret Life of Roots*, United States Botanic Gardens, Washington, D.C.

2014–2016 Palm Springs Museum of Art, Palm Springs, California. Installation

2014 *Out of this World: Works by Steve Tobin*, James A. Michener Art Museum, Doylestown, Pennsylvania

*Steve Tobin: Roots*, Museum of Art–Deland, Deland, Florida

2013 *Roots on 7*, Morrison Gallery, Kent, Connecticut

2012 *Steve Tobin's Natural History*, Philharmonic Center for the Arts, Naples, Florida

*Aerial Roots*, Grounds For Sculpture, Hamilton, New Jersey [catalogue]

*Exposed Roots*, Betty Ford Alpine Gardens, Vail, Colorado

2011 *Steve Tobin's Natural History*, Naples Philharmonic Center for the Arts, Naples Florida

*Touching Earth & Sky*, Minneapolis Landscape Arboretum, University of Minnesota, Chaska, Minnesota

2010 *Steelroots*, Katonah Museum of Art, Katonah, New York

*Steelroots*, The Morton Arboretum, Lisle, Illinois

*Steelroots*, Allentown Art Museum, Allentown, Pennsylvania

2009 *Steelroots*, Calgary, Canada. Permanent public installation  
*Steelroots*, Chicago, Illinois. Public installation

2008 *Steelroots*, The Patricia & Philip Frost Art Museum, Florida International University, Miami, Florida  
*Weeds in the Garden*, Fordhook Farm of the W. Atlee Burpee Co, Doylestown, Pennsylvania. Installation  
*Steelroots*, Kouros Gallery, New York, New York

2007 *Steelroots*, 40 Years of Art in the Parks, New York Department of Parks and Recreation, Prospect Park, Brooklyn [catalogue]  
*Cocoons*, Philadelphia International Airport. Installation  
*Steelroots*, Sculpturesite Gallery, San Francisco, California

2006 *Steve Tobin Paintings*, OK Harris Gallery, New York, New York  
*Exploded Earth*, American Museum of Ceramic Art, Pomona, California  
*Steelroots*, Kouros Sculpture Center, Ridgefield, Connecticut

2005 *Trinity Root*, 9/11 memorial, Wall Street and Broadway, New York, New York. Installation. Moved to Trinity Retreat Center, West Cornwall, Connecticut, 2015.  
*Steve Tobin Paintings*, The Banana Factory, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania  
*Earth Bronzes and New Nature*, Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens, Boothbay, Maine

2004 *Roots*, Laumeier Sculpture Park, St. Louis, Missouri. Installation  
*Roots*, Lincoln Park, Chicago, Illinois. Installation

2003 *Lantern House*, Portland Museum of Art, Portland, Maine. Permanent installation  
*Earth Bronzes*, College of the Atlantic, Bar Harbor, Maine  
*Earth Bronzes*, Florida International University, Miami, Florida. Permanent installation

2002–2003 *Naked Earth*, George C. Page Museum at La Brea Tar Pits, Los Angeles, California; ancillary exhibition, at Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, Los Angeles, California  
*Lantern House*, George Eastman Museum, Rochester, New York

2001–2002 *Earth Bronzes*, Lehigh University Art Galleries and Museum, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania

2001 *Earth Bronze Trilogy, Part I*, Buschlen Mowatt Gallery, Vancouver, Canada  
*Lantern House*, Marco Polo Gallery, 49th Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy

1999–2001 *Earth Bronzes*, American Museum of Natural History, New York, New York; ancillary exhibition, *African Termite Mounds*, Montefiore Square, West Harlem, New York  
*Cocoons*, Corning Museum of Glass, Corning, New York

1998 *Earth Bronzes*, Fuller Craft Museum, Brockton, Massachusetts. Traveled to OK Harris Gallery, New York, New York [catalogue]  
*Termite Hills*, Art et Industrie, New York, New York [catalogue]

1997 *Broadway River*, New York University, Broadway Windows, New York, New York

1996 *Matzoh House*, Gallery B.A.I., New York, New York

1995 *Steve Tobin: Reconstructions*, Philip and Muriel Berman Museum of Art, Ursinus College, Collegeville, Pennsylvania [catalogue]  
*Steve Tobin: Reconstructions*, Peyton Wright Gallery, Santa Fe, New Mexico  
*Steve Tobin: Reconstructions*, Bentley Gallery, Phoenix, Arizona

1994 Sanske Galerie, Zürich, Switzerland  
Habatat Galleries, Boca Raton, Florida

1993 *Steve Tobin at Retretti*, Retretti Art Centre, Punkaharju, Finland [catalogue]

1992 Carpe Diem Gallery, Paris, France  
*Waterglass* American Craft Museum (Museum of Arts and Design), New York, New York. Installation

1991 Lehigh University Art Museum, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania  
Habatat Galleries, Boca Raton, Florida

1990 *Cocoons*, Judy Youens Gallery, Houston, Texas  
*Steve Tobin*, Sanske Galerie, Zürich, Switzerland

1989 *Cocoons*, Holsten Galleries, Palm Beach, Florida

1988 *Steve Tobin: The Glass Garden*, Moore College of Art and Design, Levy Gallery for the Arts, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

1987 *Dream Glass*, Axis Gallery, Tokyo, Japan  
*Glass for Tea Ceremony*, Tazawa Gallery, Kyoto, Japan

1986 *Wheaton Ware*, LaVaggi Gallery, New York, New York  
*Glasscapes*, Glass Gallery, New York, New York

1985 David Bernstein Gallery, Boston, Massachusetts  
*Manhattan Bowls*, Snyderman Gallery, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

1982 *Glass Sculpture*, Gallery 10, New York, New York

1980 *Glass Portraits*, Hanson Gallery, New Orleans, Louisiana  
*Glasscapes*, Spring Street Enamels Gallery, New York, New York

1979 *Sculptured Glass*, Bienville Gallery, New Orleans, Louisiana

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS AND INSTALLATIONS

2014 *Vanitas*, Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix, Arizona

2008 *Retrospective of the Permanent Collection*, inaugural exhibition in the Museum of Art and Design (formerly American Craft Museum), Museum of Arts and Design, New York, New York

2007 *Shattering Glass: New Perspectives*, Katonah Museum of Art, Katonah, New York [catalogue]

2005–2007

*Earth Bronzes*, Spring/Summer 2005 Exhibitions, Grounds for Sculpture, Trenton, New Jersey [catalogue].

*El Bosque/The Forest*, Museo Federico Silva Sculpture Park, San Luis Potosí, Mexico. Traveled throughout Mexico and the United States [catalogue]

2000 *Roots*, Vancouver International Sculpture Project, Vancouver, Canada [catalogue]

*Exploded Clay with Glass Riverbed*, Americans in Venice Exhibition, American Craft Museum (Museum of Arts and Design) New York, New York [catalogue]

1994 Alene Lapidés Gallery, Sante Fe, New Mexico

*Waterworks*, Palm Beach Community College Museum of Art, Lake Worth, Florida  
Robert Morris Gallery, New York, New York

1993 *From Our Vault*, Wustum Museum, Racine, Wisconsin

1991 *Friends of Birdyland*, Carpe Diem Gallery, Paris, France

*Le verre*. Espace Duchamp-Villon, Rouen, France.

1990 *Glass Doesn't Grow in the Forest*, St. Augustine Chapel, Belgium

1989 *Glass America*, Heller Gallery, New York, New York (also 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993)

1986 *Southern Studio Glass*. Traveled to Kingsport, Tennessee; Asheville, North Carolina; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and Tokyo, Japan

1984 *Pilchuck Glass*. Travor Sutton Gallery, Seattle, Washington

1983 *Southern Glass*, Roanoke Museum of Fine Arts, Roanoke, Virginia

1981 *National Art Glass*, Del Mano Gallery, Los Angeles, California

1980 *Liquid Color*, Elizabeth Fortner Gallery, San Francisco, California

#### SELECTED MUSEUM AND PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

America Center, Helsinki, Finland

American Museum of Ceramic Art, Pomona, California

American Museum of Glass, Millville, New Jersey

Boca Raton Museum of Art, Mizner Park, Boca Raton, Florida

Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

City of Calgary, Canada

Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens, Boothbay, Maine

Coca-Cola Corporation Collection, Atlanta, Georgia

CSC Global, Wilmington, Delaware

Florida International University, Miami, Florida

Fordhook Farms, Doylestown, Pennsylvania

Frost Art Museum, Miami, Florida

Golisano Children's Museum of Naples, Naples, Florida

Gratz College, Elkins Park, Pennsylvania

Grounds for Sculpture, Hamilton, New Jersey

James A. Michener Museum of Art, Doylestown, Pennsylvania

J'ing'An Sculpture Project (JISP), Shanghai, China

Karl Stirner Arts Trail, Easton, Pennsylvania

King Faisal's Palace, Saudi Arabia

Lehigh University Museum of Art, Lehigh, Pennsylvania

Lowe Art Museum, Miami, Florida

Moravian College, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania

Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Lausanne, Switzerland

Museum of American Glass, Wheaton Arts and Cultural Center, Millville, New Jersey

Museum of Art and Design (MAD), New York, New York

National September 11th Memorial and Museum, New York, New York

New Orleans Museum of Art, New Orleans, Louisiana

Palmer Museum of Art at Penn State University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Philip and Muriel Berman Museum of Art, Ursinus College, Collegeville, Pennsylvania

Retretti Art Centre, Punkaharju, Finland

The Sculpture Foundation Collection

Stephane Janssen Collection, Phoenix, Arizona; Santa Fe, New Mexico

Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, Ohio

The White House Permanent Art Collection, Washington, D.C.



Exploding clay at the artist's studio, Pleasant Valley, Pennsylvania

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[David, please leave a little room here.]

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**PHOEBE HOBAN** has written about culture and the arts for a variety of publications, including the *New York Times*, *New York Magazine*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *Vogue*, *Vanity Fair*, *GQ*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *ARTnews*, and the *New York Observer*, among others. Her biography of Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Basquiat: A Quick Killing in Art* (1998), was a national best seller and a *New York Times* Notable Book of the Year. Her biography *Alice Neel: The Art of Not Sitting Pretty* (2010), was named one of the Best Books of the Year by *New York Magazine*, one of the Ten Best Books of the Year by the *Village Voice*, one of the Ten Best Biographies of the Year by *Booklist*, and a *Sunday Times Book Review* Editors' Choice. Her most recent book, the biography *Lucian Freud: Eyes Wide Open*, was published in 2014. *Basquiat: A Quick Killing in Art*, came out as an e-book with a new introduction in 2016.

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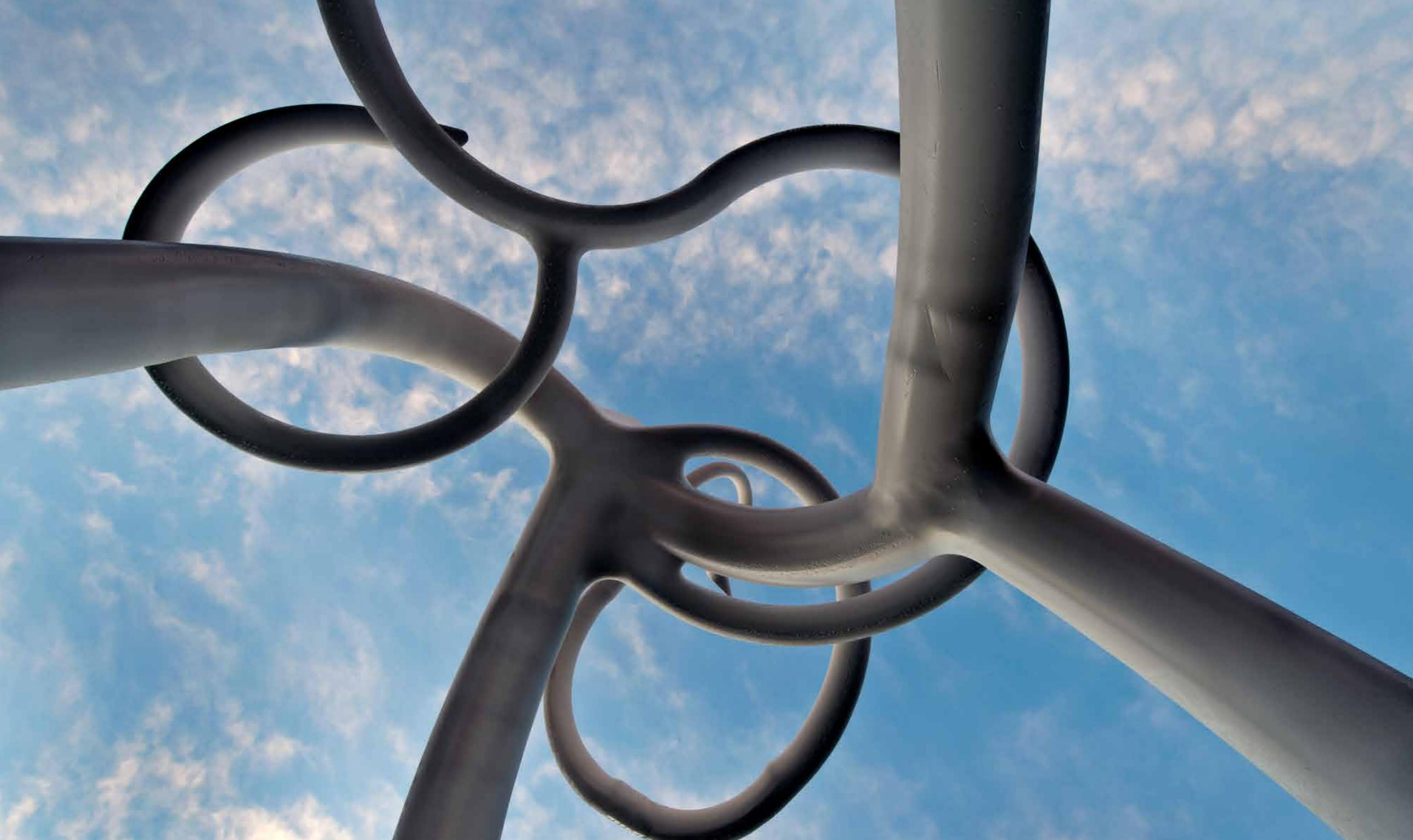
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