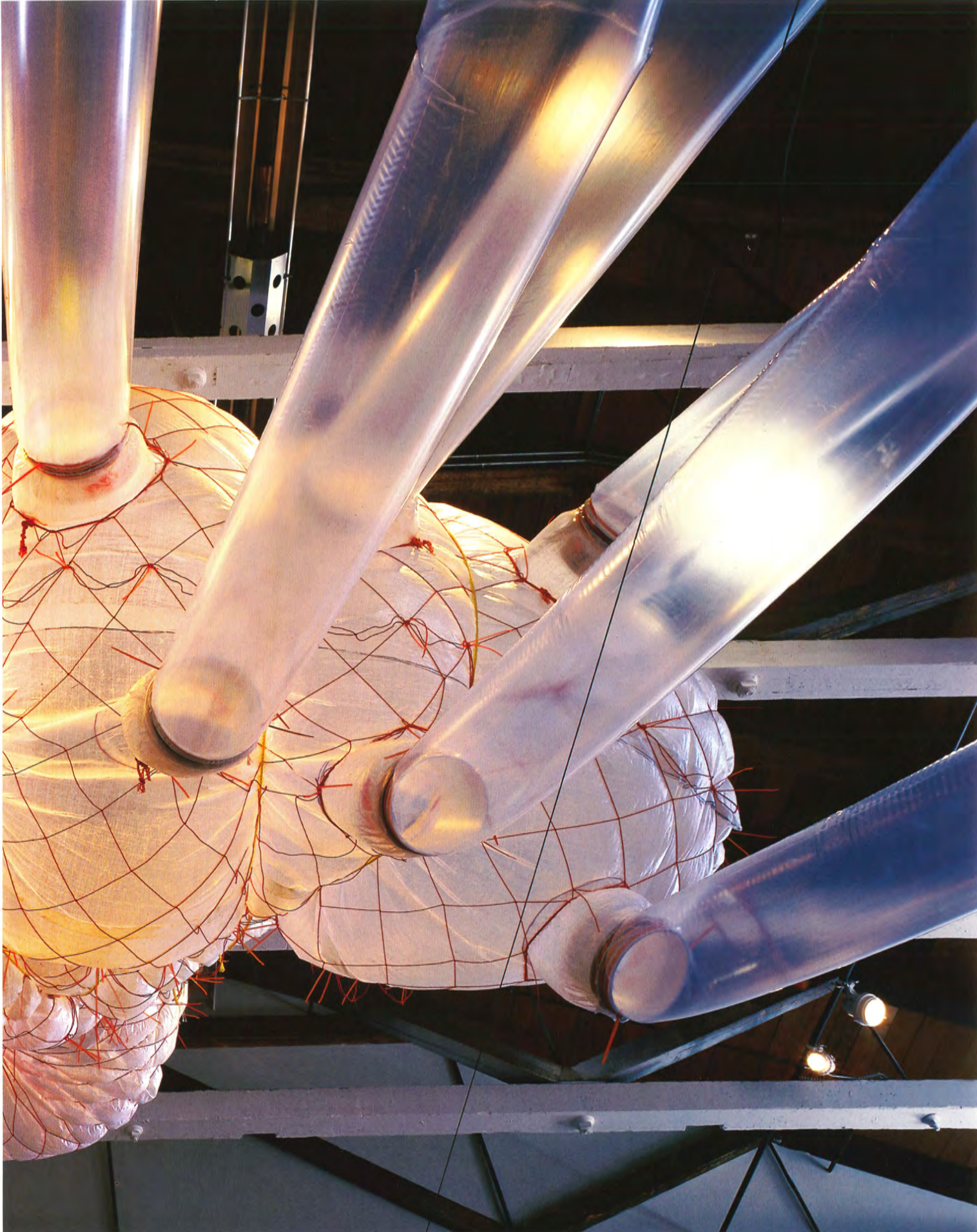


tim hawkinson



tim hawkinson

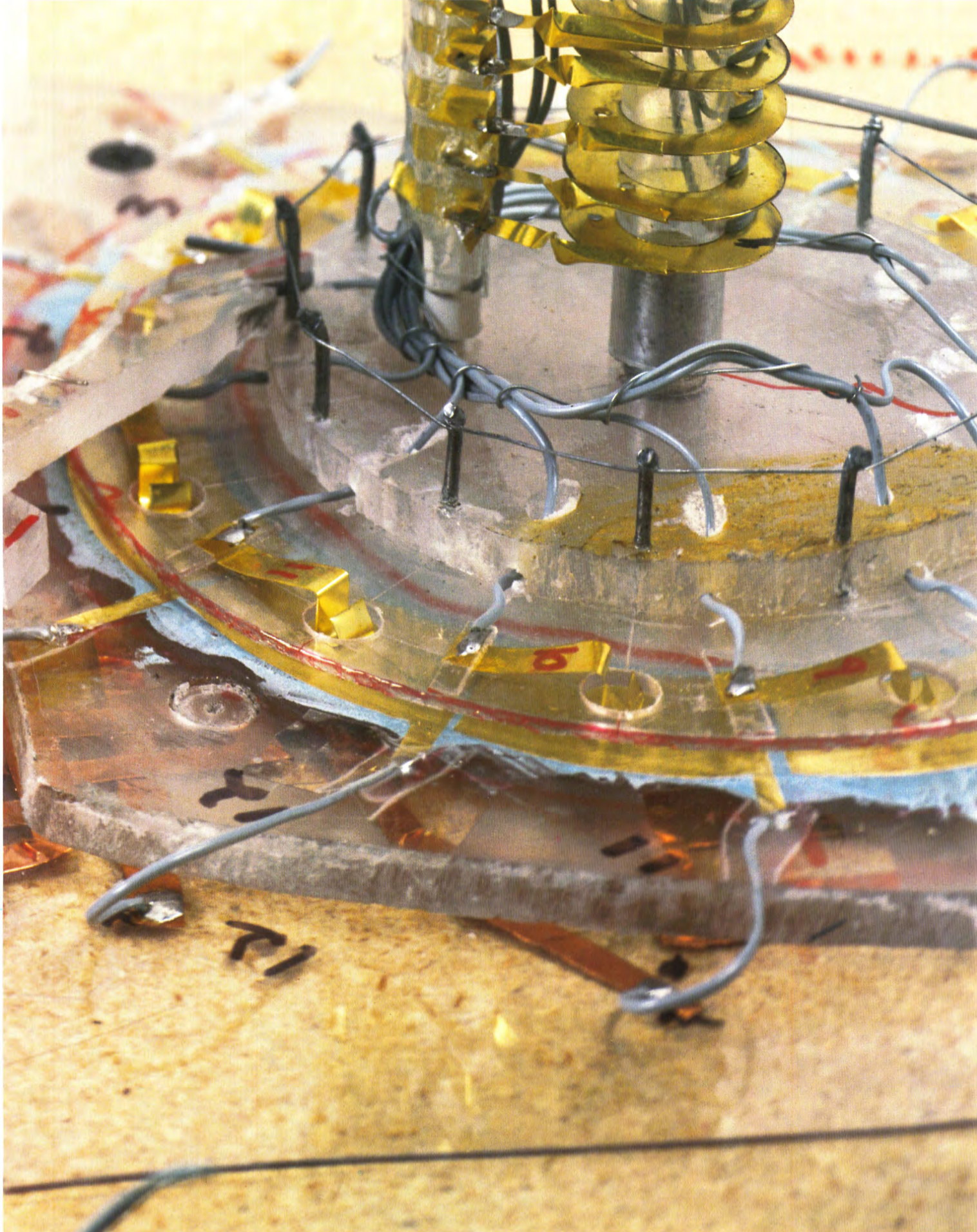




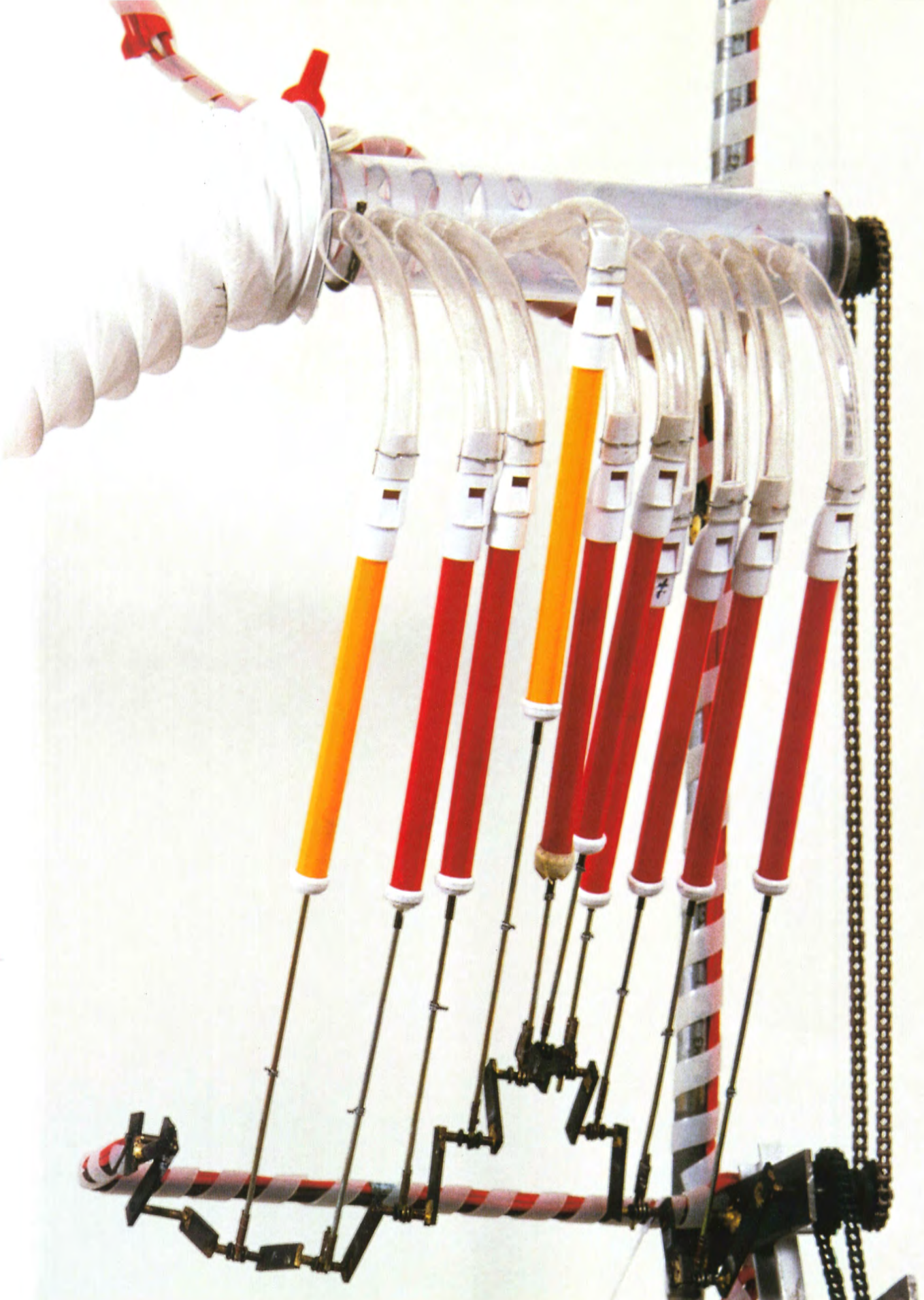


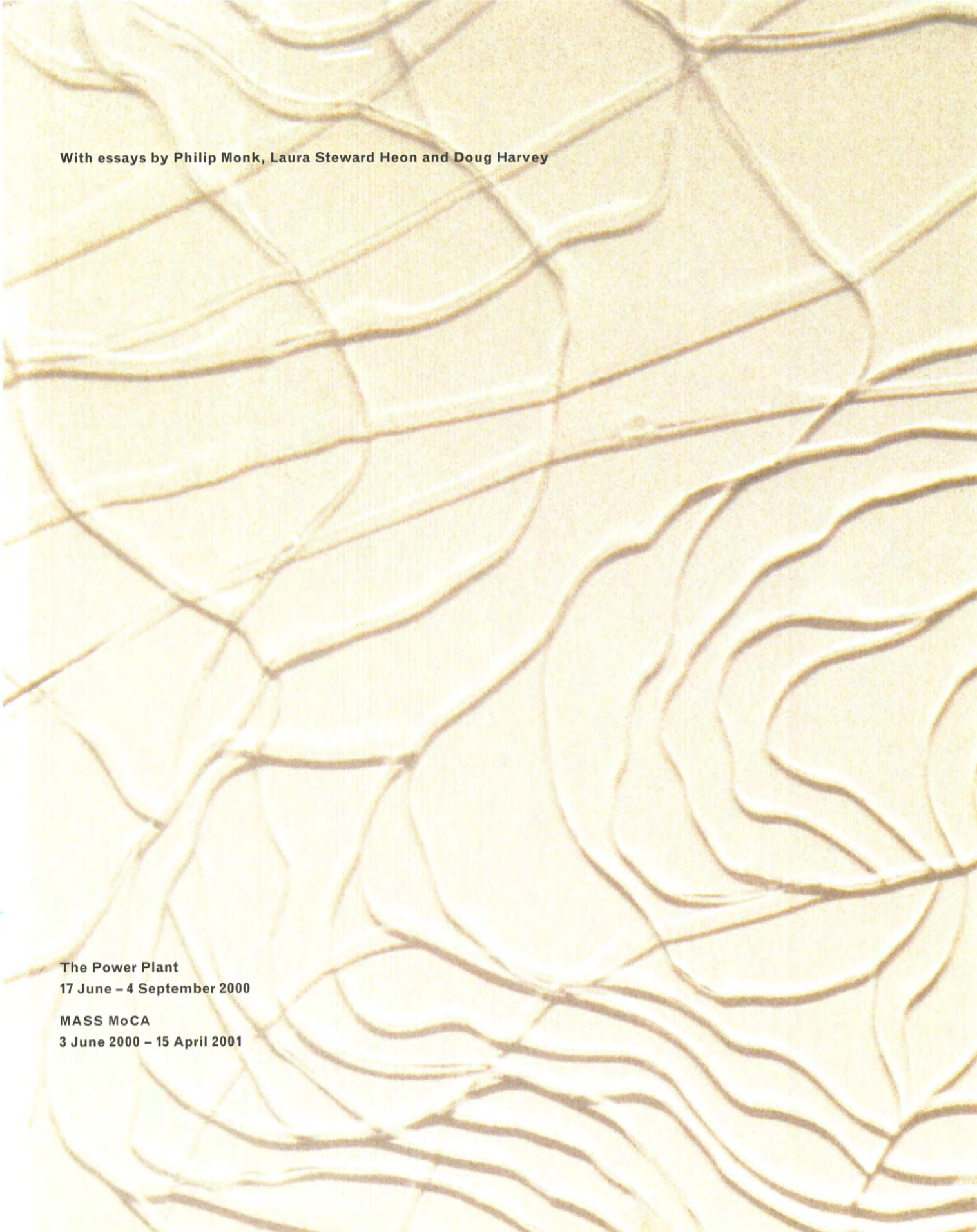












With essays by Philip Monk, Laura Steward Heon and Doug Harvey

The Power Plant
17 June – 4 September 2000

MASS MoCA
3 June 2000 – 15 April 2001



tim hawkinson

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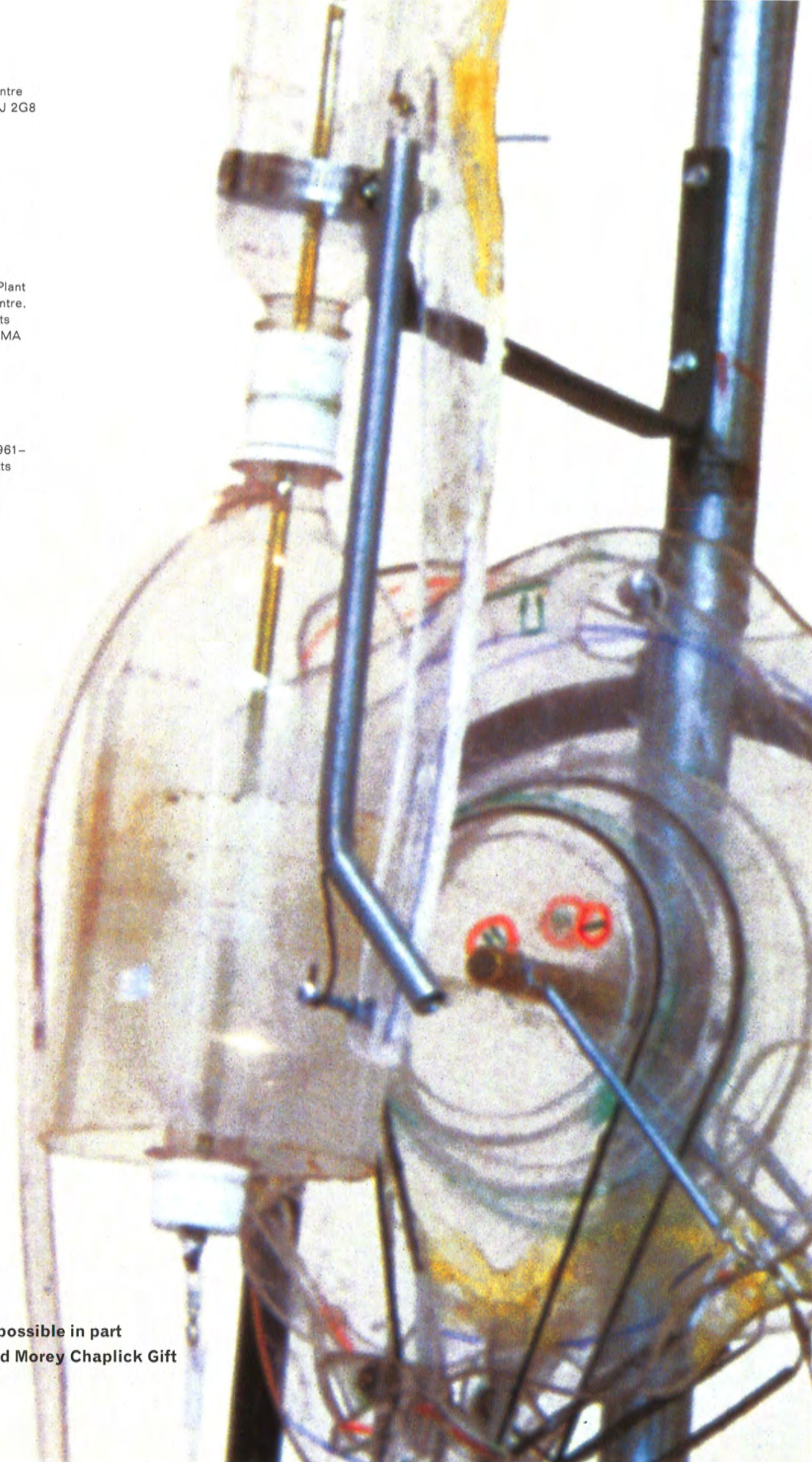
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directors' foreword

Innovative and prolific, Tim Hawkinson knows no physical or conceptual bounds for his artwork. The Power Plant and MASS MoCA are proud to be able to bring you this publication which documents two exhibitions of Tim Hawkinson's work: *Tim Hawkinson*, an exhibition of the artist's recent work at The Power Plant in Toronto, Ontario, and *Überorgan*, a major commissioned installation at MASS MoCA in North Adams, Massachusetts.

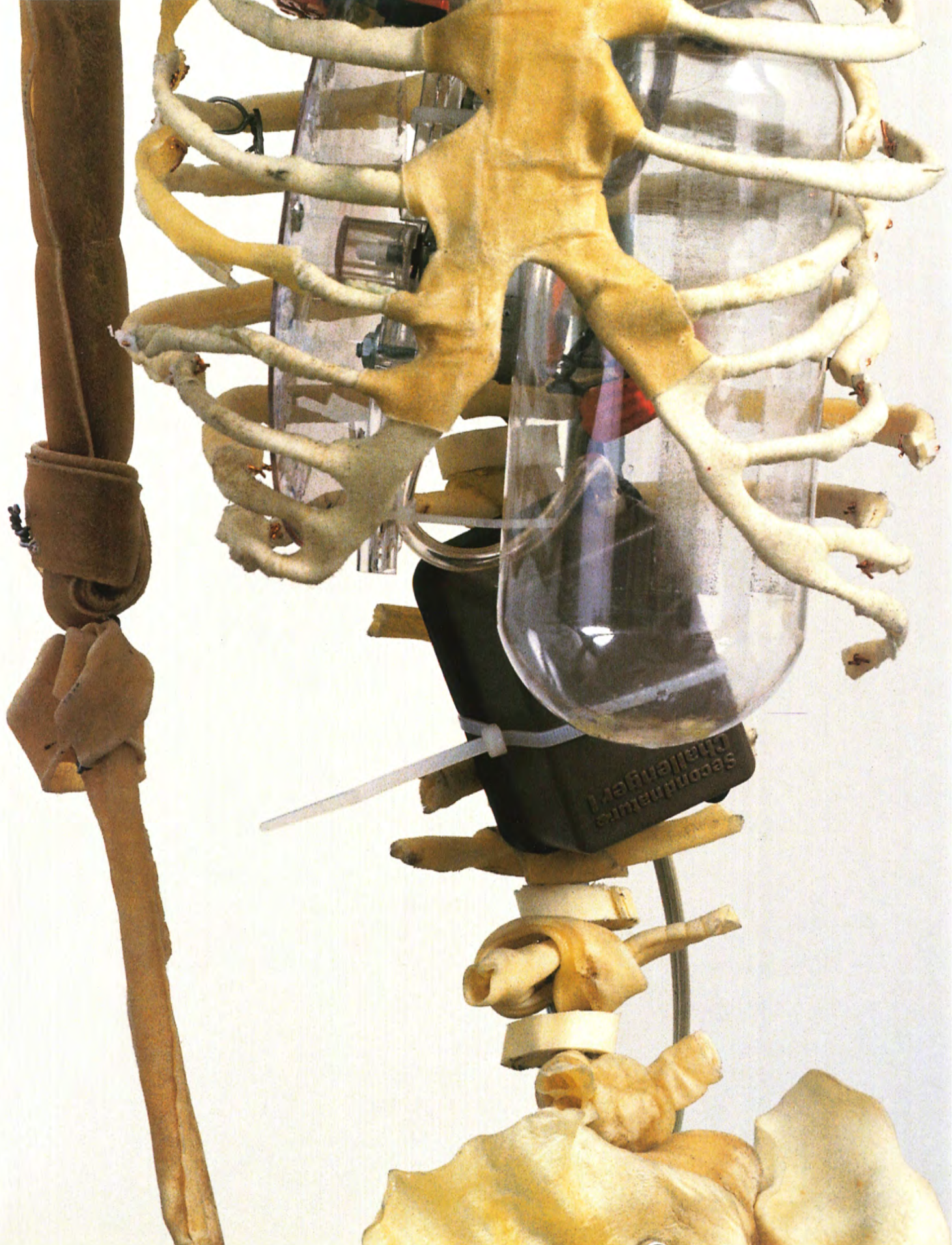
The Power Plant is grateful to those who have made the exhibition possible, especially Tim Hawkinson and those private collectors who lent the works that constitute it: including Tony and Gail Ganz, Duff Murphy and Janice Miyahira, and Eileen and Peter Norton, among others. We are grateful for the support of agencies at all three levels of government: the Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council and the Toronto Arts Council. Without their support, this exhibition would not be possible. We extend our warm thanks to Tim Hawkinson's representative, Douglas Christmas of Ace Gallery. Thanks also go to Laura Massino of Ace Gallery.

MASS MoCA extends special thanks to the Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation, the LEF Foundation, the Peter Norton Family Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Massachusetts Cultural Council, the Robert Lehman Foundation and the Ellis L. Phillips Foundation, all of whom helped underwrite *Überorgan*.

Our appreciation is also owed to Doug Harvey, whose essay provides an informative account of the persistent themes that Hawkinson continues to develop and expand. Finally, many thanks are due to Philip Monk, Curator at The Power Plant, who also organized the catalogue, and to Laura Heon, Associate Curator at MASS MoCA. Both curators have contributed enlightening essays on the work exhibited in their respective institutions, and their shared enthusiasm for Hawkinson's work has helped pave the way to a seamless collaboration on this publication. The felicitous timing of these two exhibitions makes it possible to enjoy Hawkinson's extraordinary work in unusual depth.

Marc Mayer
THE POWER PLANT

Joseph Thompson
MASS MoCA



tim hawkinson: man with no skin*

DOUG HARVEY

Tim Hawkinson has been something of a disappointment to me. When I first came to Los Angeles as a UCLA grad student in painting, I pretty casually followed my nose as to what art to look at in my spare time. I first met Hawkinson quite early on, as the spouse of Patty Wickman, a young and idiosyncratic painter teaching at UCLA. The transparencies he showed me during a studio visit left me dumbstruck and a little delusional. I thought the emerging 90s Los Angeles art scene would be riddled with Hawkinsonian artists, redefining all the rules of art-making for the sake of novelty, humour, spiritual and philosophical bite, conceptual complexity and sensual pleasure. I thought Hawkinson was an example of the competition; I was a little worried, but mostly exhilarated. Here was work that seemed to be taking the concerns of groundbreaking California conceptualist sculptors Chris Burden and Bruce Nauman (and more recently and problematically Charles Ray) in a new and surprising direction, carrying the torch of chameleonesque self-reinvention and deeply funny philosophical engagement that these artists had to some extent abandoned into some Gyro Gearloose hall of mirrors. If this was indicative of what LA art in the 90s would be like, I would be witness to a Golden Age. No such luck. Over the next decade, LA art as a whole was dominated by unambitious decorative keepsake crap, as 80s stalwarts like Mike Kelley, Paul McCarthy, Jim Shaw and even interesting newcomers like Jason Rhoades left the local scene for the greener Kunsthalls of Europe and New York, leaving a void to be filled with candy-coloured tchotchkes and intelligence-lite pushpin installations. Although Hawkinson himself continued to

astound in a series of increasingly elaborate exhibitions, he was the exception to the rule and suffered somewhat for his anomalous complexity.

The first thing that struck me about Hawkinson's art was its sacrilegious use of found objects and trash in a milieu then (and still) obsessed with aping the slick, post-human look of industrial fabrication. This is an aesthetic with a great deal of baggage in California, what with psychedelic trash-pickin' daddy-o's Ed Kienholz, Bruce Conner and George Herms and the hordes of lesser assemblagistes that fed off their scraps. There was, and remains in place, an equation of the use of cast-off cultural material with distasteful self-indulgent expressionism. Such tendencies continue to be tacitly discouraged in the graduate group critiques and living-room galleries of post-Art Bust LA. Hawkinson's work is different, though. It achieves the kind of conceptual stringency that most of the pseudo-intellectual clean freaks could only aspire to; yet it is wonky and funny, emotionally and visually startling, and always, always surprising. His hobbling of cultural detritus into elaborate mechanical automata, such as the mind-boggling and heart-breaking *Signature Piece* (1993), seems impossible. *Signature Piece* laboriously inscribes the artist's name on a scrap of paper and cuts it off, starting over again and again right before your eyes. His lo-tech simulation of hi-tech materials or processes, such as his "holograms" made from layers of cheap iridescent film or packing tape, or his giant CDs made of tinfoil gum-wrappers, or the sampling and digital processing mimicked in *Cyctor* (1997) are like a painstaking post-apocalyptic Cargo Cult recreation of lost technologies. Whole careers have been built on fewer ideas than are contained in a single Tim Hawkinson piece.

There is something of the dumpster transcendentalism of Kurt Schwitters, Robert Rauschenberg and the Arte Povera movement in Hawkinson's *oeuvre*. But where these artists in their redemptive formalist wallowing leave themselves open to charges of anti-intellectualism, Hawkinson's minute attention to empirical detail, and to traditional systems for organizing same, absorbs and reconfigures Apollonian left-brain skepticism as part of a far larger and more permeable membrane. His *Humongolous* (1995) and *Blindspot* (1991–95) self-portraits recall the psych-text homunculus drawings of a distorted figure

meant to convey the proportionate representations of tactile functions in the cerebral cortex (which amounts to a remapping of the epidermis according to the density of nerve endings). As such, they suggest a corrective disruption of Western sensory hierarchy, including the critical faculty, but most specifically as regards the skin.

Dermatological Neuroses

The skin is a container, surface and interface — the first and most important organ of communication. Hawkinson's work may be read as series of skins — overlapping or concentric, culminating in the artist's full engagement as the outer skin of conceptual activity — positing a superficiality that contains the secondary systems that critique it. They confront and protect those systems from the formless void outside of discourse while constantly regenerating. This skin confronts the zone of reception of the artist's work — stretching in planes tangential to those it has been previously fitted into, resulting in frequent and serially contradictory laments that "his *last* body of work was great but now he's lost it," (which only proves that people who are paid in one way or another to express their important opinions are less able to appreciate novelty and change than the public).

Hawkinson's artworks continue to grow more unwieldy and gargantuan over time, occupying and activating vaster and vaster spaces while contradictorily engaging the audience more intimately through the use of motion-sensor activated mechanisms and other environmental manipulations. The programming of the architectural space of the Ace Gallery and elsewhere with the site-specific wall bladder *Reservoir* (1995), and umbilical tubing leading from room to room to a variety of inflatable latex self-images dramatically alters the experience of even unconnected art pieces. Orchestrations of sound and scale and the imposition of a theatrical narrative structure onto the viewing experience constitute yet another dermatological layer. The typical dynamic for viewing a Hawkinson piece involves a subtle perceptual choreography: a first impression and investigation, followed by a literary reframing in the reception of the punchline, followed by a completely reordered impression

and investigation — awakening, implicating, even recruiting the viewer's cognitive apparatus as a participant in an immersive theatrical aura that surrounds the work in a cloud of potentiality. The viewer's engagement with the work is further stretched and shaped by the kinaesthetic effects of scale, both in relation to the giant pieces and the tiny miniature bird skeletons and eggshells constructed from the specialized ectodermal fragments of the artist's exfoliated hair and nails. Sound pieces such as *Barber* and *Cow* (both 1997) tease the viewer's attention around corners and into other rooms: an invisible body triggers *Barber* to resume its endless microtonal cascade or the tiny bath-generated figures of *Cow* to beat a tattoo on a mannequin's hide.

The integument is the largest organ in the human body and functions simultaneously as a receptor of subtle and complex information from the environment and as a cosmetic playground for sending information back out. It is Hawkinson's closest, most literal analogues for skin that grab and hold our attention: the puffed-up latex impressions of his own scrawny, depilitoried carcass; the labour-intensive transcriptions of his land-sat surveys of his own visible and non-visible body parts; his skinless self-portraits made from rawhide or pastel. In these works, the notion of skin as boundary is challenged and examined, and the literal skin of the artist is replicated as closely as possible, made other and uncanny. The instrument of the "artist's touch" is represented by a painstaking surrogate, surrounded by uniformed guards who ask that we "Please don't touch the art." In many cases, human skin's celebrated elasticity is portrayed undergoing formidable trials, stretched to capacity.

Q: What happens to the thin-skinned sensitive artist when the thinness reaches a degree at which surface tension cannot be maintained?

A: The radical intermingling of art and life.

Q: What best way to draw attention to this potential?

A: Stop just short of it.

Inflation suggests deflation. Overinflation suggests explosion — a radical and violent reordering of inside and outside. The oozing suit-of-armor piece, *Enigma Wrapped in a Mystery* (1996), suggests an inside that has outgrown

its old shell; but the percolating ectoplasm is still contained by a mesh of seemingly elastic metal chain-mail. This mediating elasticity — a sort of gearing down of the work's explosive energy, a flexible, semi-permeable containment of an exponentially burgeoning interiority — is found repeatedly in Hawkinson's work.

In *Überorgan* (2000), a gigantic player-piano/bagpipe hybrid designed to fill the hangar-like space at MASS MoCA, the artist reinforces the organ's massive air-bladders with a psychedelically torqued grid of heavy-duty poly-whatever mesh. The inflated reservoirs, waiting to channel their pneumatic plasma into the elaborately contrived system of tubing, pipes and reeds to be translated into droning hymns and popular classical themes, are protected from rupture and collapse should inspiration fail or get backed up. Other work depicts the distension and distortion wrought by powerfully expanding energies — the warp and woof in graphic works like *Draw! Weave! Paint! Spin!* (1996) or *Wall Chart of World History from Earliest Times to the Present* (1997) — suggest a seething, contorted volumetric presence pressing up against the other side of the picture plane, bulging, pregnant with the "Through the Looking Glass" complexities that people Hawkinson's imagination. Like a fat lady squeezed into too-tight fishnets, his work manifests a provisional, temporary containment of a potentially disintegrative tsunami of unfiltered reality.

Bondage & Discipline

The willful containment of explosive energies inevitably conjures psychosexual and spiritual connotations. From the implicit claustrophobia of the gradual submersion in black paint that produced the *Bathtub-Generated Self-Portrait* and its multifarious progeny (*Drain and Plug*, *Bathtub-Generated Contour Lace*, *Hologram Man*, the *Pentecost* figures, etc.) and the pop corsetry of *Hangmanofmycircumference* (1995) to the close resemblance between *Balloon Self-Portrait* (1993) and the clinging full-body (occasionally inflatable) latex suits of the rubber fetish crowd and the glottis-clogging totally gag-like *Mouths* (1992), Hawkinson plays with the same primal anxieties of post-partum vertigo that are otherwise theatricalized and mediated only by perverts

and body artists. Bondage may be considered, on the one hand, a ritualized microcosmic reclamation of the socially and politically monopolized privilege of boundary-definition (i.e. Who gets to say where I leave off and everything else begins?), and on the other an entirely evolutionarily designed tool for the psychological management of the big-brained human complications to the fundamental organic process of growth. These readings are recognizable in Hawkinson's obvious interest in the biological sciences and the social construction of reality. Premature infants bound in swaddling clothes grow faster and healthier. Sensory deprivation techniques ranging from Lilly suspension tanks to medieval witches' cradles were found to facilitate the rapid acceleration of psychic expansion, to the point of transformational spiritual visions.

The spiritual content in Tim Hawkinson's work is subtle, but ubiquitous. The constant appearance of air as a material (*Pneuman*, 1994, one of the early inflatables, is titled after the Greek word *pneuma*, meaning both "breath" and "spirit"), his graphic meditations on his own mortality in *Penitent* (1993) and *Alter* (1994), the recurring mandala-like compositions and the almost Islamic calligraphics of his spiral automatic music drawings in *My Favorite Things* (1992–93) all come to mind immediately. But it is this overriding metaphor — tapping a powerful transpersonal energy and finding techniques that allow its safe release into the world, without overwhelming the medium — that, in its similarity to spiritual systems like Tantra or the Kabbala, evokes the numinous most vividly. But unlike, say, Bill Viola, whose quotations of Rumi sometimes get a little heavy-handed, Hawkinson preaches not. Instead, the spiritual appears as part of a continuum of phenomena that includes the individual psychological, sexual, social, cultural, political, historical, philosophical and sensory realms — a continuum in which Hawkinson's practice is situated holographically.

This is typical of great art: it resolves meaningfully from every possible angle, even if we can't put our finger on the exact mechanism. This makes it hard to write about. There's just too much imminent content in Hawkinson's work to catalogue. Nevertheless, I'd like to pursue one more variation of this particular theme: containment/release as a metaphor for the creative process.

The idea of creativity as an external energy being channeled through the antenna-like artist is as old as the activity of art itself. The prehistoric shamanistic object-makers who invented art were presumably *literally* possessed by creative spirits, and the Muses of Greek mythology began a long history in Western culture of understanding art as dependent on metaphysical inspiration, a tradition unbroken until the challenges of conceptual art in the 60s, where Hawkinson's work is rooted.

Rehabilitating the Genius Myth

Skepticism has grown since the 1950s — the height of Abstract Expressionist painting's programmatic reduction of the time, rational control and (in the popular imagination anyway) work between inspiration and its execution. Perhaps in response to the flood of decidedly uninspired canvases that were produced in imitation of the New York School, artists and pundits began suggesting that "genius" was a romantic fiction, used for excusing inexplicable art atrocities and for keeping creative activity as a special district of experience, inaccessible to regular people in their everyday lives. Some went even further, scornfully dismissing any content not intrinsic to actual physically definable art materials, decrying projected meaning as invalid (except, of course, in the case of their own utopian strivings). Harnessing the language and stylistic signifiers of academic scientism, they sought to exorcise the muse from art by gridding, mapping, quantifying and cataloguing its most minute particularities, leaving no room for ambiguity or heresy. The result was to reduce art to a crabby pseudo-science like phrenology or statistics. Even at its "purest," art is a messy contingent thing. The drive to limit art to incrementally smaller and tidier domains speaks more of an artist's or critic's own xenophobia than of ultimate truths.

In his emphasis on the way energy is generated, contained and transmitted, Hawkinson alludes directly to, or establishes metaphorical resonances with, the problematic history of the artist as conduit. Again the examples are legion. In pieces like *Slug* (1992) and *Spin Sink* (1993), frantic rotational energy is geared down to an almost geological time-scale. Inspiration is hermetically recirculated through the labyrinthine airflow circuitry of the *Reservoir*, *Fat Head*

(1993) and *Balloon Self-Portrait* installations, and released into the outside via mathematically regulated musical emissions in the *Bagpipe* (1995), *Tuva* (1995), *Penitent*, *Barber* and *Überorgan* works. The abstract gestural artmarks that make up the flesh-tone of *Blindspot* resolve, on close inspection, into repeated scrawls of the subtitle "Fat Head." The aforementioned inscribed spirals of *My Favorite Things* straddle the worlds of horror vacuii manuscript illumination and Mark Tobey's gestural automatism. In Hawkinson's ongoing fascination with knots, particularly the rigging of ships to translate wind (our planet's breath) into tangible, culturally valuable activity, the act of art-making results in (among other things) a metaphorical model of its own creation. While this line of exploration is presented, again without preachiness, Hawkinson is still clearly skeptical about the "genius" trope; nevertheless he insists on bringing the concept back into play, often with the very language previously used to dismiss it. In the same way as his carefully girded balloons cautiously but incessantly inflate, Hawkinson's *oeuvre* gently but relentlessly expands the acceptable limits of polite conceptual art-making — pushing into new territories certainly, but more improbably rehabilitating such academically disparaged domains as cultural detritus, spirituality and artistic inspiration.

In his continual expansion of the boundaries of what constitutes acceptably "serious" art, Tim Hawkinson has left behind a series of beautifully patterned shells. We contemplate them for their sheer beauty, but as their superimposed latticeworks criss-cross, elaborate informational moirés offer themselves up to us. We are awed by the seeming vastness of potential material, but it is kept at bay — for the time being. I wonder what Hawkinson will do next. He has to stop sometime, he can't make a new skin for all of creation. I wonder if maybe the 00s won't be the decade when dozens of artists of Tim's stature will emerge and electrify the Los Angeles art scene with their brilliance, humour and compassion. But I'm not holding my breath.

*I spent almost as much time finding this anagram for the artist's name as I did writing this essay, but it has an extra N in it. A tighter fit, and equally appropriate was HOW MAN IS KNIT (much better than TINKI SNOW HAM). A 1996 survey in Pasadena of the artist's work was entitled AHI IKMNNOSTW.

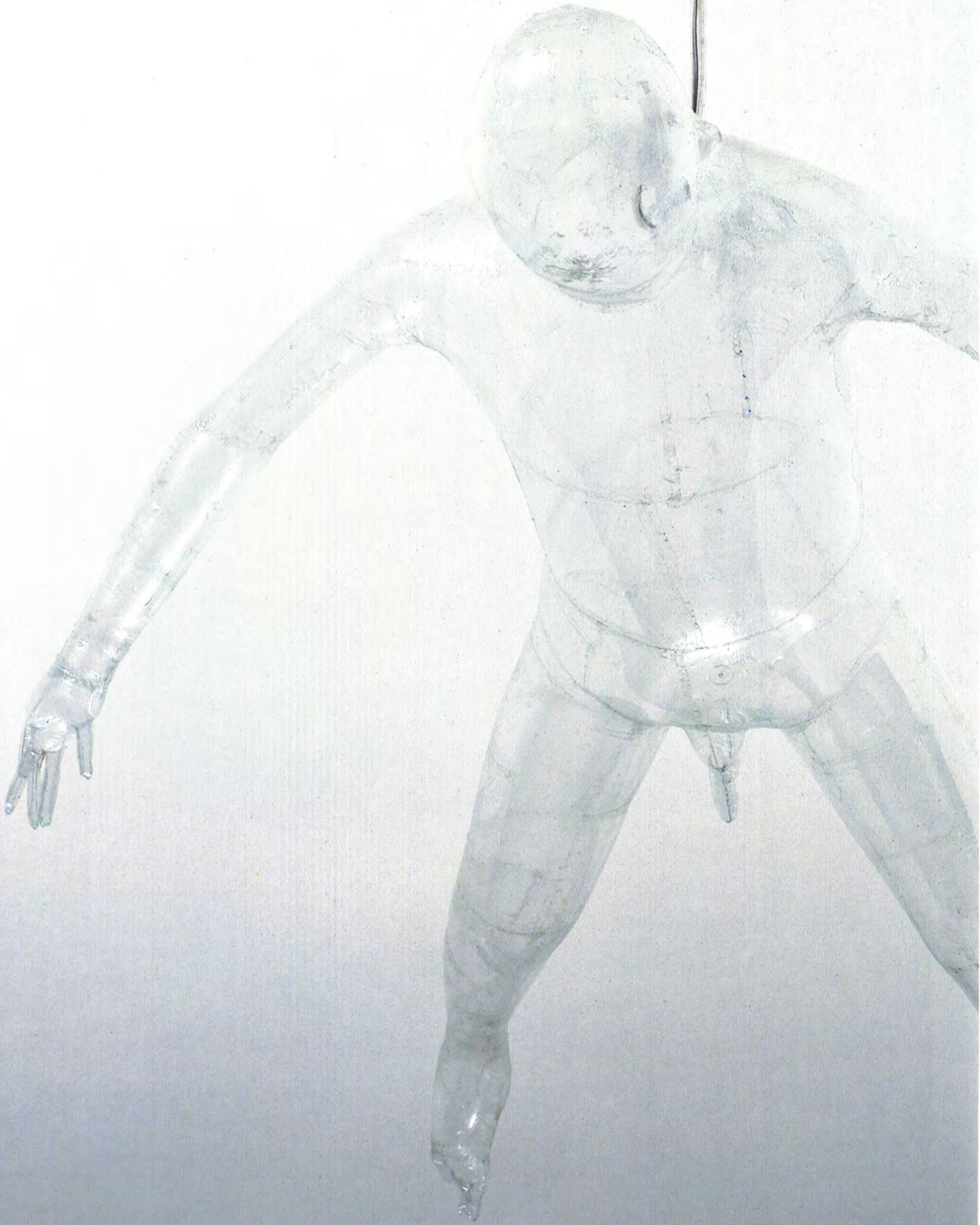


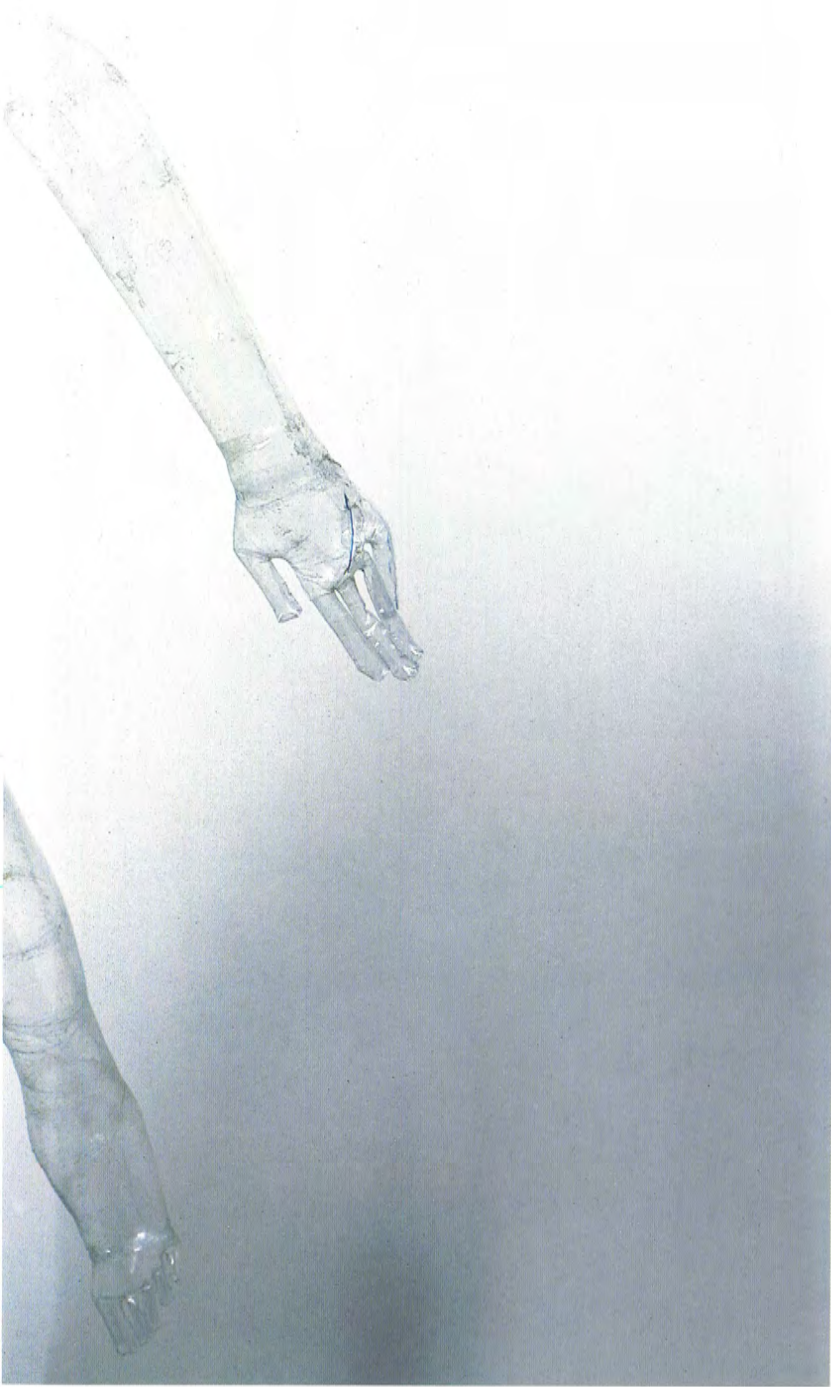
Signature 1993 *(left)*

school desk, paper, pen, mixed media
94 x 71 x 61 cm
Private collection

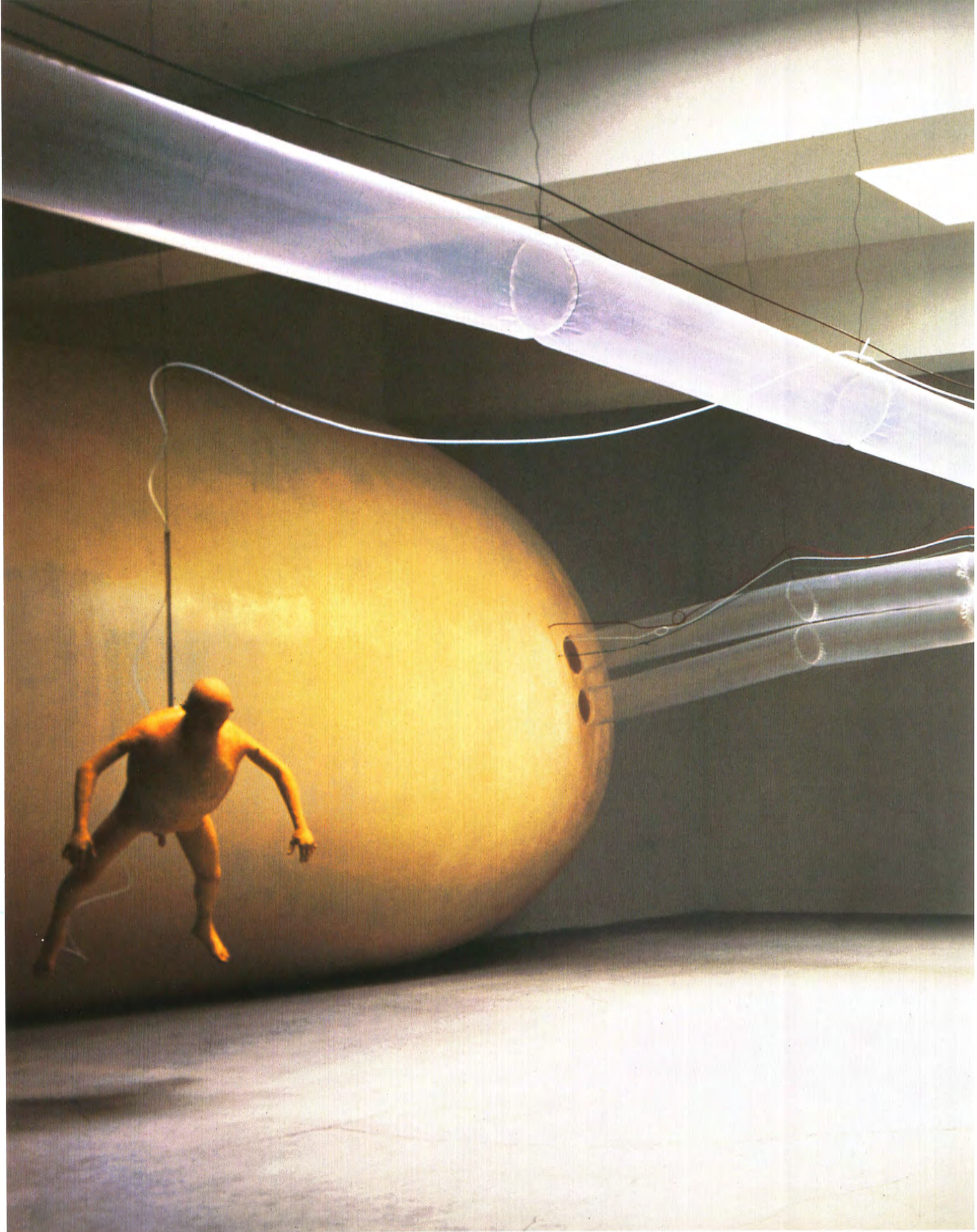
Bagpipe 1995 *(right)*

vinyl, cardboard tubes, mixed media
244 x 361 x 610 cm
Private collection





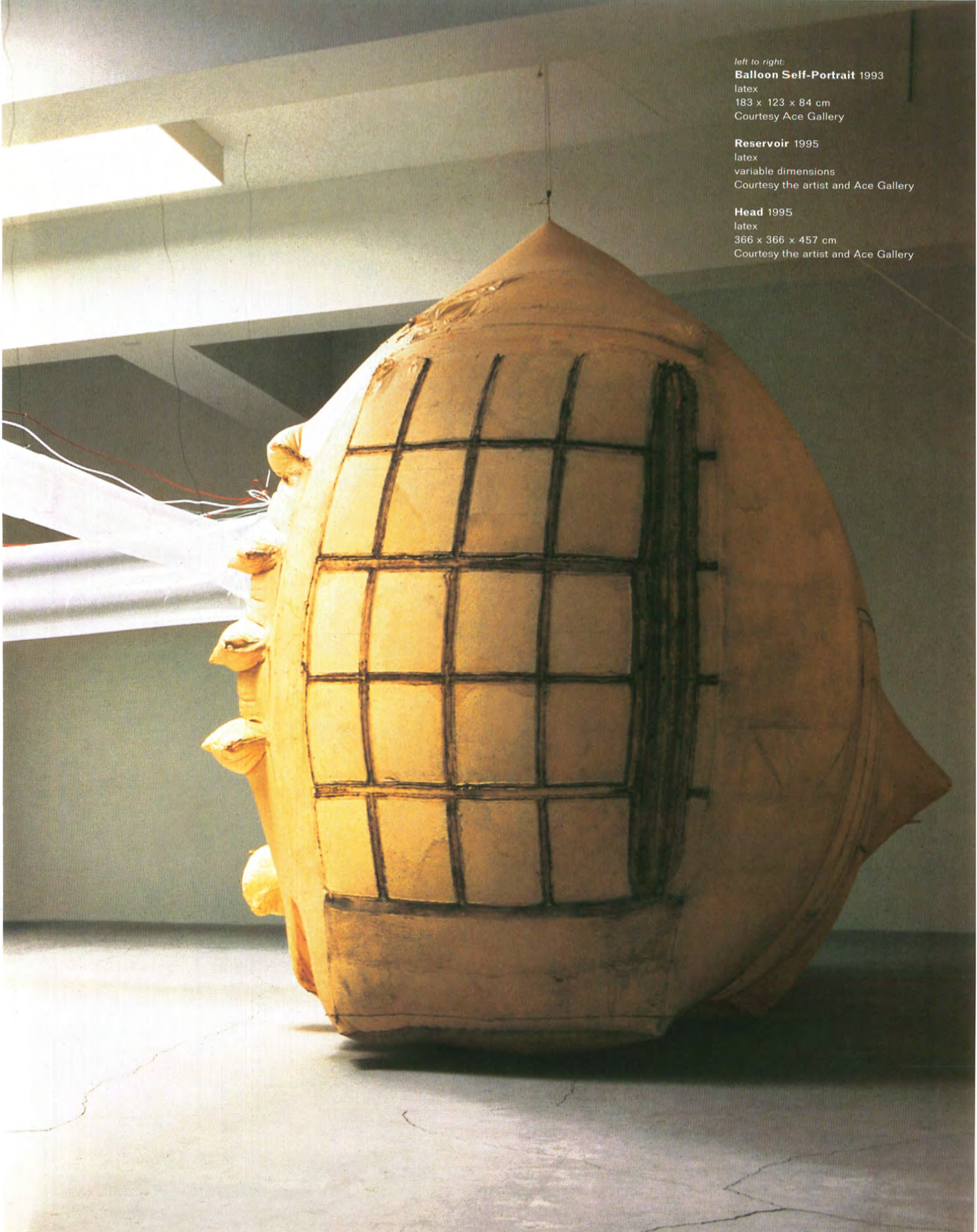
Pneuman 1994
vinyl, air, pump
137 x 201 x 96 cm
Private collection



left to right:
Balloon Self-Portrait 1993
latex
183 x 123 x 84 cm
Courtesy Ace Gallery

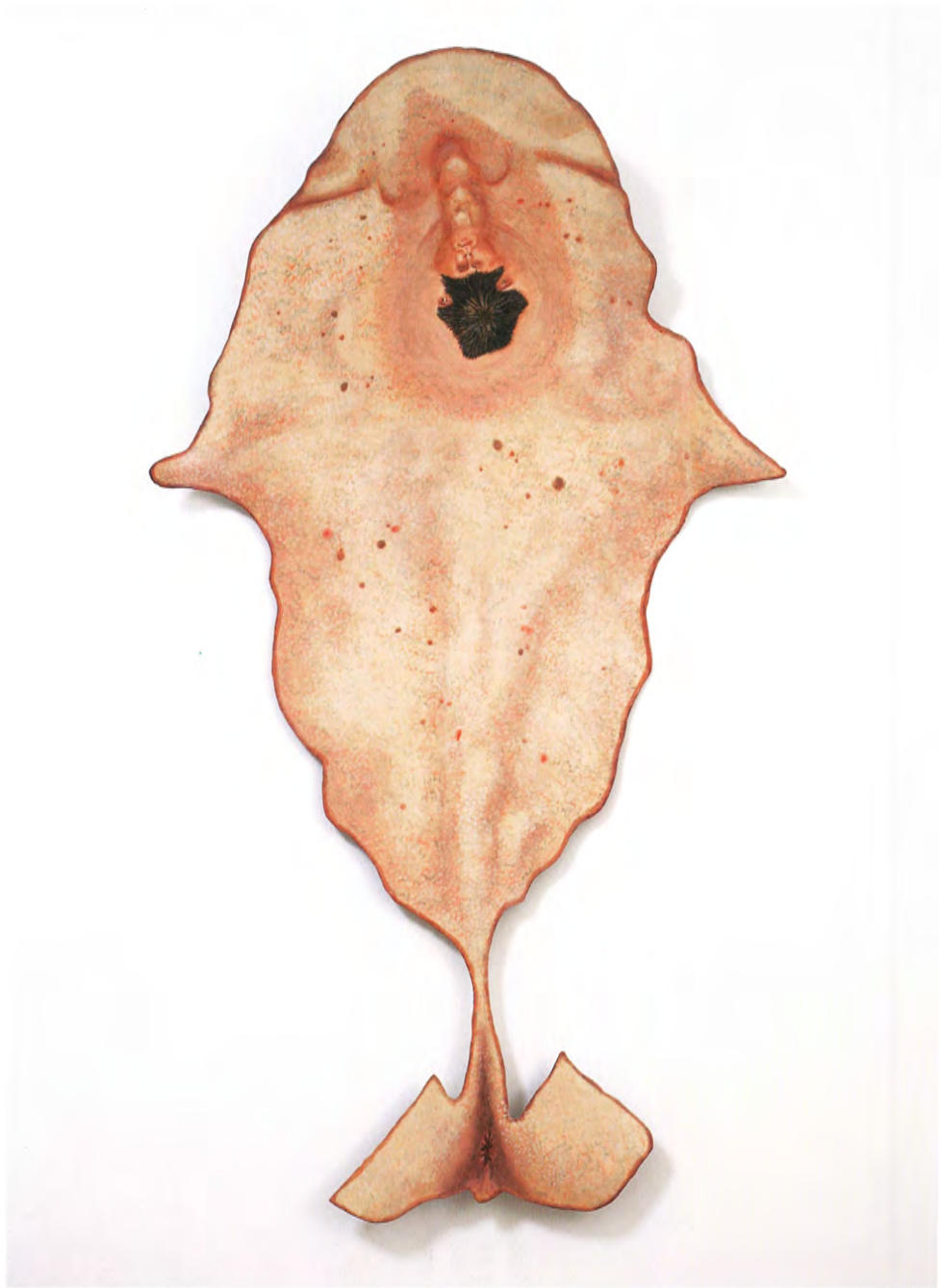
Reservoir 1995
latex
variable dimensions
Courtesy the artist and Ace Gallery

Head 1995
latex
366 x 366 x 457 cm
Courtesy the artist and Ace Gallery





Humongolous 1995
acrylic, paper
102 x 61 x 10 cm
Courtesy the artist and Ace Gallery



Blindspot (Fat Head) 1993
acrylic, resin, wax on paper on steel
262 x 142 x 46 cm
Collection of Los Angeles County Museum of Art



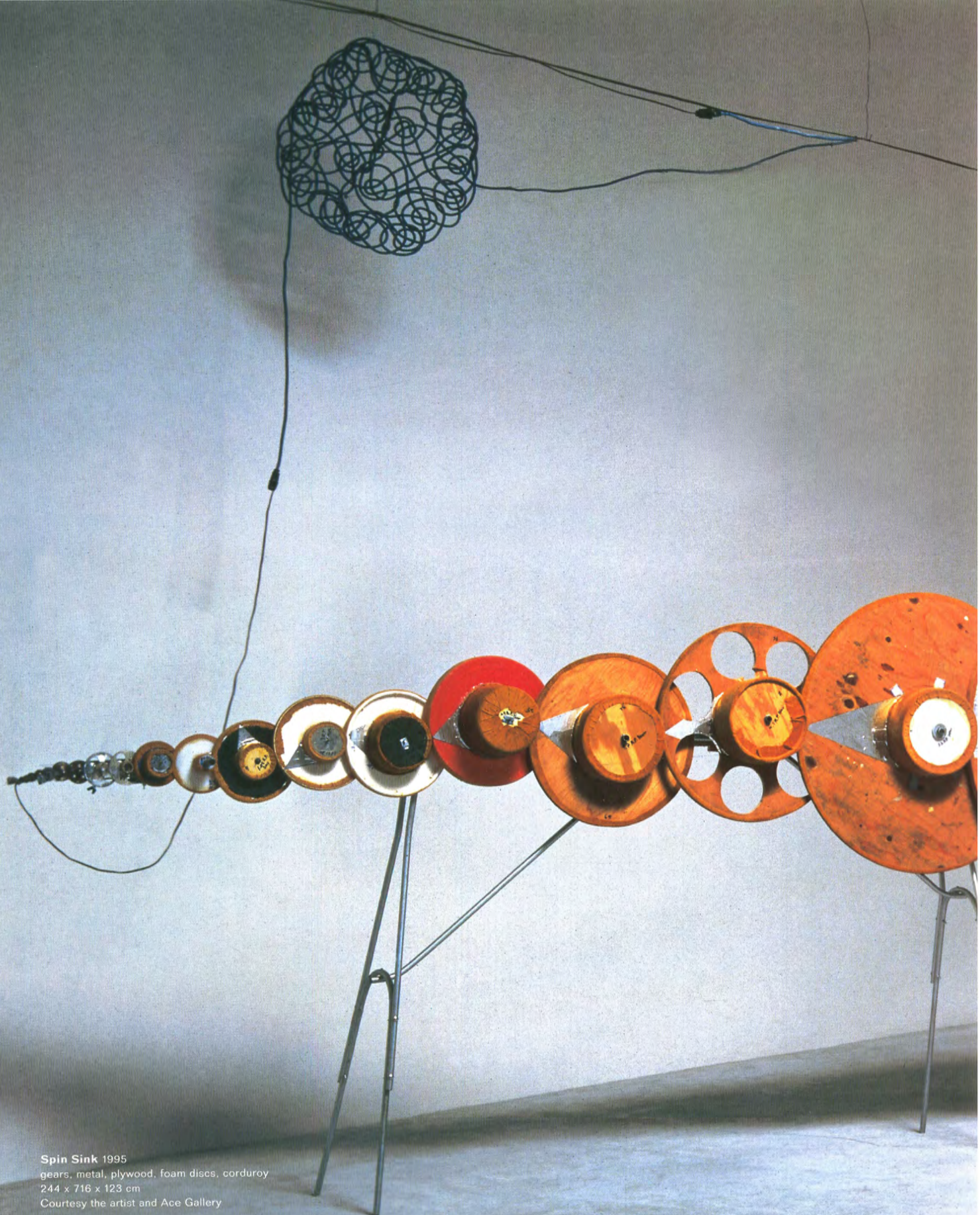
Bathub-Generated Contour Lace 1995 *(left)*

ink on paper
203 x 83 cm
Private collection

Penitent 1994 *(facing page)*

rawhide, mixed media
123 x 46 x 46 cm
Courtesy Ace Gallery



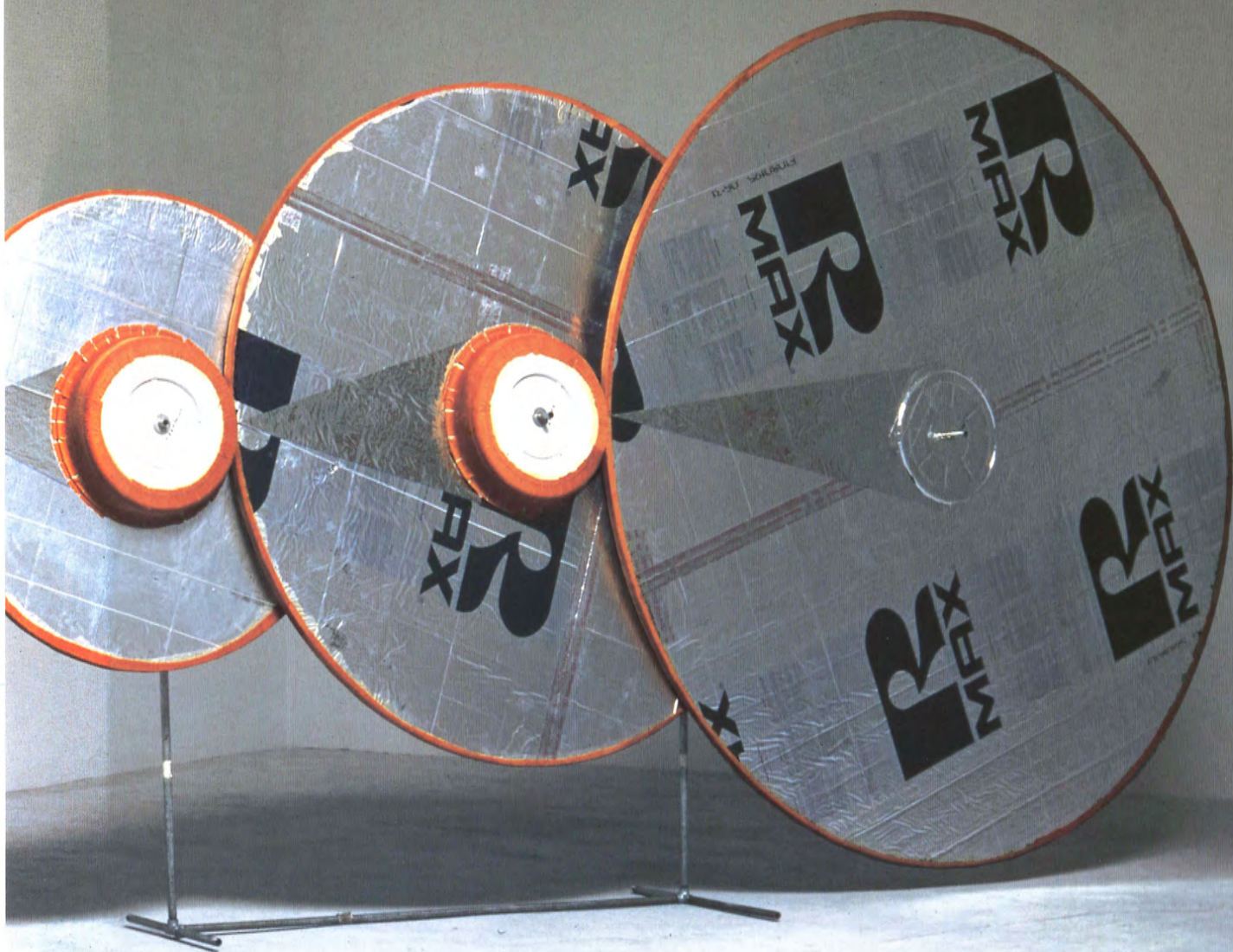


Spin Sink 1995

gears, metal, plywood, foam discs, corduroy

244 x 716 x 123 cm

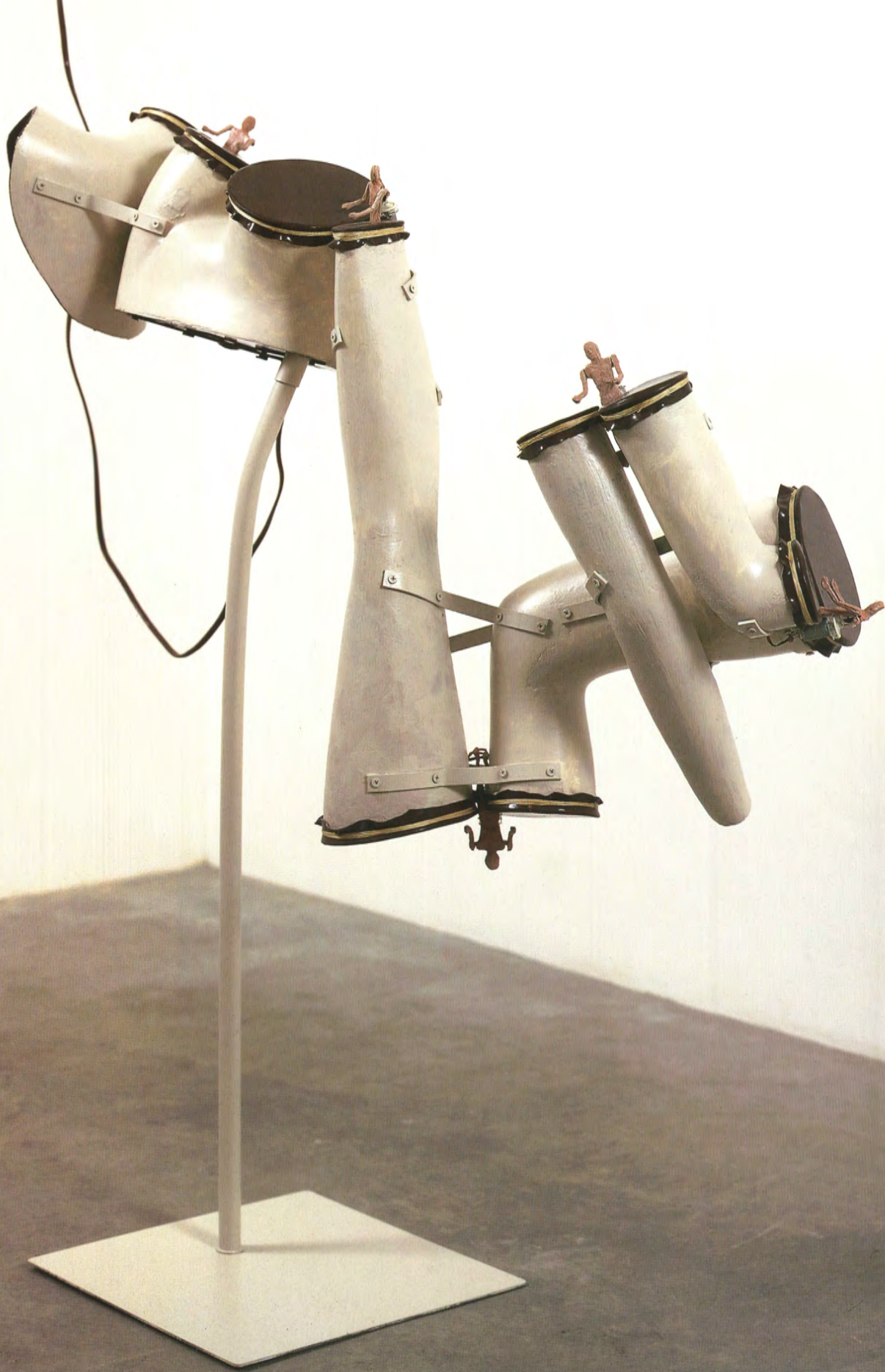
Courtesy the artist and Ace Gallery





Tuva 1995 (*above*)
plastic bottles, mixed media
112 x 61 x 51 cm, 58 x 10 x 13 cm
Private collection

Cow 1997 (*facing page*)
polymer clay, mannequin, silicone,
computerized program
112 x 107 x 58 cm
Collection of Eileen and Peter Norton, Santa Monica



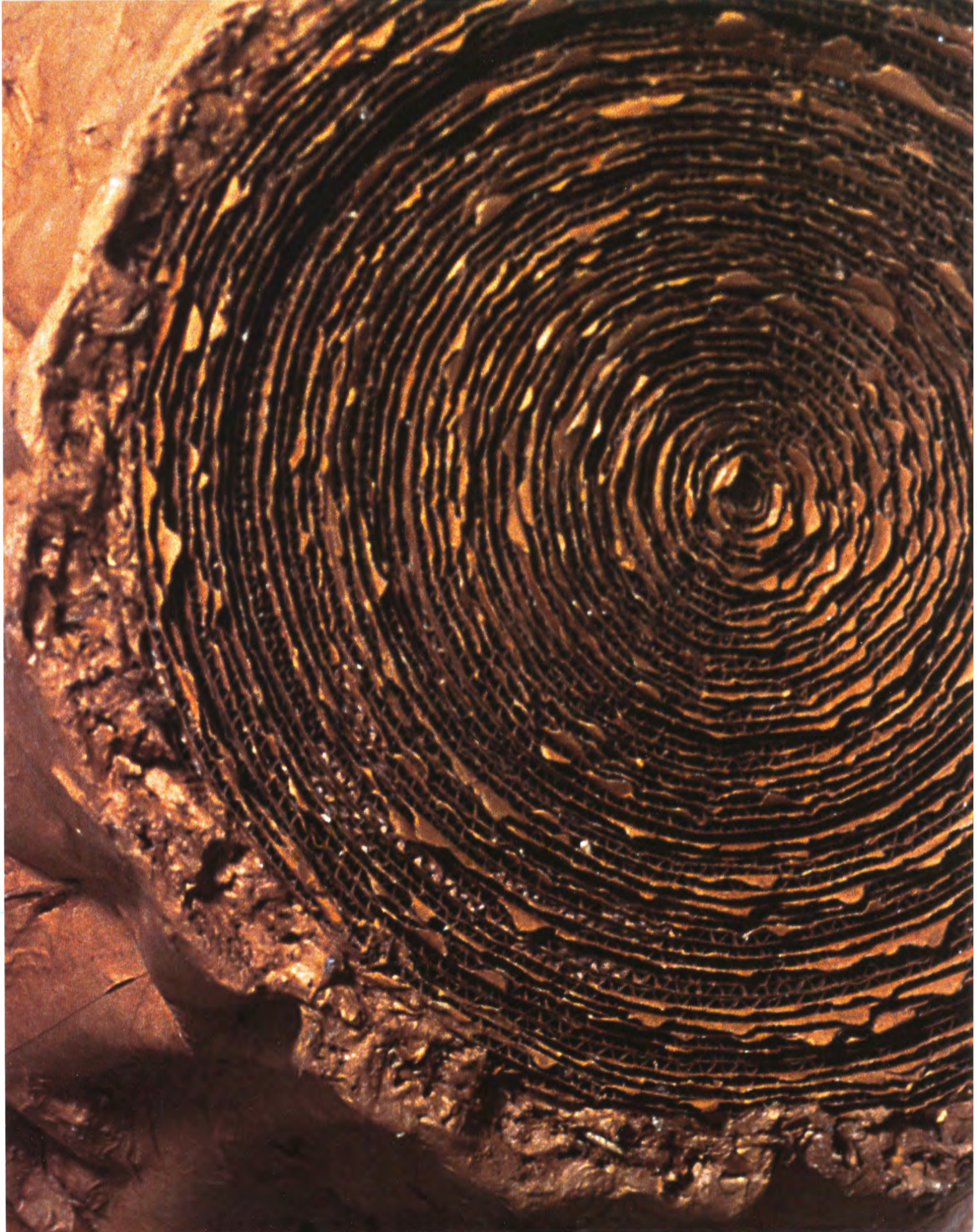
Cytor 1997

altered photograph, foam core

152 x 102 cm

Collection of Eileen and Peter Norton, Santa Monica





intromissions

PHILIP MONK

And experience shows that there is no flux without eddy, no laminar flow which does not become turbulent. Now, and here is the crux of the matter, all times converge in this temporary knot: the drift of entropy or the irreversible thermal flow, wear and aging, the exhaustion of initial redundancy, time which turns back on feedback rings or the quasi-stability of eddies, the conservative invariance of genetic nuclei, the permanence of a form, the erratic blinking of aleatory mutations, the implacable filterings out of non-viable elements, the local flow upstream towards negentropic islands — refuse, recycling, memory, increase in complexities...What is an organism? A sheaf of times. What is a living system? A bouquet of times.

Michel Serres, "The Origin of Language: Biology, Information Theory and Thermodynamics"

Most commentators wonder at the sheer inventiveness and diversity in Tim Hawkinson's work. They attribute Yankee ingenuity and a tinkerer's sensibility to an eccentric production where Rube Goldberg meets Marcel Duchamp. Hawkinson uses unlikely waste materials unconventionally in sculptural constructions that mimic the workings of various machines and instruments or the appearance of diverse natural bodily systems. But there is nothing natural about the resulting automata, which seem instead to share with each other an arrested dysfunctionality. For example, the closed systems of *Signature* (1993), a machine for writing the artist's signature, and *Bagpipe* (1995), a giant instrument played through the air ducts of its exhibiting space, have no need of human impetus or inspiration to pursue their mournful tasks.

A cynical cybernetics is not the usual reading of the artist's works; yet at the same time, as whimsical his works might be, as intellectually seductive they present themselves, they are also more than intriguing mimicries — jokes we quickly get but which then exhaust themselves in the perpetual motion of

the sculptures' machine-like absurdity. A world is described by Hawkinson whose poetic, for want of a better word, links each sculpture to another in an elaborate and continually unfolding cosmography.

To describe this cosmography is a difficult task, however. This world does not unfold itself by revealing a rationale that can be followed along a narrative path where one tries to link the elements of a work or the thematic relations between different works into a symbolic whole. This despite the ripe symbolism of the tree that recurs in his work. But the tree has none of the trappings of elevated romantic humanism about it. His work is down-to-earth. And, having a predilection for waste materials, Hawkinson usually takes what is ready at hand for investigation and transfiguration.

His universe is thus mapped on and traced through the lowly body — which often happens to be the artist's own. The mappings that result seem to be twofold: corresponding to both the visible surfaces and the invisible depths of the body. On the one hand, its unique surface topography is charted in new and odd configurations. For instance, in the *Blindspot* series (1991–95), the artist represents all the areas of his body that he cannot directly see, with the result that the body appears as a loose rug flung from the hairline. Conversely, in *Humongolous* (1995), he depicts all his epidermis that is visible to him — the work's distortion is due to his embodied perspective.

To the breadth of these spatial representations, Hawkinson treats the body to another concept that maps it or measures its span — that of time. For a number of works, starting with *Bathtub-Generated Contour Lace* (1995) and continuing through to *Pentecost* (1999), Hawkinson had himself photographed every ten seconds in a bathtub as it slowly filled with black paint. *Drain and Plug* (1996) shows the process. Such a sectional reckoning plots the body in two-dimensional increments over time. Seen from above, this contour map tells time much like the rings of a tree. Here mapping space cannot be separated from measuring time.

Flaying the skin from its inner armature, on the other hand, opens the body's internal circuitry or structure to view. Thus we are presented with a mapping of, in the artist's words, the "'vein' and 'neuro' systems" of a junked

Hammond organ (*Organ*, 1997), the simulated x-ray of the shroud-like *Alter* (1997) or the anatomical model of a skeleton made of rawhide dog bones in *Penitent* (1994). In Hawkinson's universe, no part of the body is wasted in examination or unconsidered as a material for visualization.

Yet, we cannot so easily dichotomize surface and depth in his work, full as it is of inversions — like a glove turned inside out. While *Graph* (1999) — a self-portrait made from the imprint derived from latex pulled from the artist's body and made into paint rollers — actually maps the exterior of his body, its pink colouration makes us think that we are seeing his insides, accessed through the orifices imprinted on the surface of the paper.

Such distorted images deviate from established representations of modelling and mapping insofar as they follow other, imaginatively conceived systems. The translation of a three-dimensional body to two dimensions is one of the most common. If these translation procedures reappear frequently in Hawkinson's work, it is to mock a rigid conventionality. All Hawkinson's works, perhaps, are translation systems of sorts. Not that we have to find the key to unlock the meaning for what may only be evidence of a process. What we take as a representational end-product is really a picture of a process of transformation, a communication between two different levels of organization or information. Some philosophers, such as Michel Serres, conceive of the body as a nesting of communications — a series of messages sent between different levels of organic integration. Each of Hawkinson's works is a message of this sort.

The tree is a handy model for the networks that exist in Hawkinson's work, rather than a profound symbol. Let's look at one that uses the tree explicitly as a metaphor and support: *Pentecost* refers to the incident recorded in the New Testament of the Holy Spirit descending on a gathering of apostles and speaking in tongues. Twelve humanoid figures sit on the branches of a tree made from paper and cardboard tubes, very much like a scenic tree in a stage set. The figures sit as if they inhabited the tree, or they hang from it like fruit and seem to display an easy, symbiotic relationship with it. An appendage from each of these bodies — a nose here, an elbow

there, a big toe or a penis — tap out rhythms on the truncated branches, which function like drums. These percussive rhythms, generated from Christmas carols on a computer program that the artist found and modified, resonate through the hollow tubes. Over the time that we experience this piece, they create rhythms of differing complexity.

The music that the figures individually produce, which unites them in its polyrhythm, has nothing human about it, though. At least in its original making and use, it is a spiritless mechanical rendering of clichéd tunes that are unrecognizable due to the artist's translation of the original melodies into rhythms. *Pentecost's* dumb musicality deflates the metaphor of inspired breath that invests this religious event with reverence. Despite this conclusion, it seems necessary to rescue this work from the idea that communication comes to naught, because this is not at all the spirit of the artist's work.

What is being communicated without words in *Pentecost* if not communication itself? Communication may take various forms and circuits in Hawkinson's works. The messages are not language based; his work plays with signals from the genetic realm to the cultural domain. We might follow these different pathways through the works in the exhibition, as if along the branches or roots of a tree. Here we discover the intersecting themes: the tree, with its branches metaphorically linked to networks and circuits, the blood, nerves and respiratory systems of the body, or to other electronic systems; sound, percussively or pneumatically produced without human presence, as a model of messaging; new topographical models of representation based on the body but radically transformed; and the silent measures of time, which might be calibrated according to the different spans manifested in the natural world and in the human realm, from micro to macro.

Hawkinson's works exteriorize the invisible codes and the silent communications that give form and structure to our bodies as biological entities. The spiritualizing symbolism attached to insufflation may lose value, but the connective and integrative import of communicative circuits — whether those of language, veins or nerves — gain value. Music might be made, circulated and sustained by machines, but it is nonetheless communicative. Thus, being

more than noise, it is meaningful. The language orientation of a message may humanize it but the silent communication of the code is just as much a message as its audible component is, and serves to unify our being and connect it to the life forms of the world. *Pentecost's* messaging system is a symbol of the all-embracing connectivity of life on earth in which the human participates with the non-human, the living with the inert. As Serres writes, "a macro-molecule, or any given crystallized solid, or the system of the world, or ultimately what I call 'me' — we are all in the same boat. All dispatchers and all receivers are structured similarly."¹ Perhaps this is the spiritualism of a cybernetic age.

I am not suggesting that the tree of *Pentecost* is the central or originating metaphor for Hawkinson. There is no centre, only linkages established in every direction, as in the transversal weave of fabric. In his work, we do not seek out analogies but homologies. Images of nerves and blood vessels are mapped onto the tree, or vice versa, because they share similar communication circuits. One does not explain the other. The tree of *Pentecost* and its human "fruit" share in manifold principles. Neither takes precedence over the other. Although Hawkinson always uses his own body, the human is not necessarily the measure of all things.

If we can place Hawkinson's depictions of the body — dissections, we should rather say — between the natural world of the tree and the artificial zone of automata, it is not to maintain a hierarchical separateness for it. By taking the body apart, he has revealed its incorporation into larger circuits existing within both natural and speculative systems. Many of Hawkinson's functional works seem to have their origins in traditional automata, those writing machines, calculators, clocks and self-playing musical instruments so popular from the Renaissance to the nineteenth century. Philosophical play-things before they became the fascination of artists in the modern period, automata were speculative devices more than tools. They were used to question the relation between the human and the non-human. Since they were meant to be self-sustaining machines, Hawkinson's contribution to the idea of the automaton has been to "breathe life" into its specifically musical manifes-

tation. *Pentecost* and its prototype *Cow* (1997), with their percussive mechanics now computer-operated, mimic more traditional automata. Hawkinson's pneumatically driven automata include *Bagpipe*, *Überorgan* (2000) and *Barber* (1997); but *Tuva* (1995), a machine that hums polyphonically, is the only one that attempts to reproduce the human vocal apparatus. Oddly, this handyman automaton, made from recycled plastic bottles and other waste bits, has the less-than-majestic appearance of a respiratory support system.

In a cosmologically oriented age, the classic automaton was the clock, which served to displace the notion of the human to the inhuman span of the cosmos. Hawkinson's works vacillate between similar extremes. Whether it is the direct subject or not, and whether the mechanisms are visible or not, time has always been an issue for Hawkinson. We have already noted a clock obliquely operating in the bathtub-generated contour self-portraits. Other works more obviously function like clocks, as camouflaged as they are in appearance. Some plot time in its traditional sense, although obscurely: one of the "clocks" of *Secret Sync* (1996) tells time by the movement of two hairs on a hairbrush; others employ larger scales as recording devices, such as the cross-section of a tree in *Concentric Circle: 705-Year-Old Tree Drawing* (1989). *Spin Sink* (1995) joins micro to macro; its ever-larger gears funnel out from their motion source — a slot car motor frenetically rotating at 1400 rpm. The final gear completes one revolution in an eighty-three year life-span. A work that combines the genetic and the historical, *Stamträd (Family Tree)* (1997) charts the branchings of a theoretical family tree traced back ten generations. The usual branchings of the genealogical tree have been reshaped by means of coded popsicles sticks that mimic the cross-section of an actual tree. History is inverted here: time radiates out from the present to the past, from the individual in the centre to his progenitors.

Morphologically similar to *Stamträd*, *Shatter* (1998) is a fake shattered tempered-glass window, which is actually meticulously constructed from mirrored ribbons sandwiched between plastic sheets. In this "transcription," we see the record of a blow delivered to the centre of the "glass." However instantaneous such a chance happening might seem to be in real life, the radi-

ating patterns of its shock-waves actually grow over time. Is there a pattern guiding even such arbitrary events similar to genetic determination? Is its rationale any different from Hawkinson's seemingly absurdist charting of the rise and fall of empires modelled on the digestive system of the body in *Wall Chart of World History from Earliest Times to the Present* (1997)?

The branchings in Hawkinson's work do not function like those of a logic tree but radiate outward, gathering new references and associations in their wake. Each work multiplies themes in transversal connections, while individually instantiating a node in the network. A perfect example of this is *Shorts* (1993), which weaves a garment from the slack of an electrical extension cord deployed in the exhibition space that powers another work. The theme of the tree connects to that of the ship in *Aerial (Mobile)* (1998), television antennae rigged with sails, through the intermediary of the bemasted tree of *Das Tannenboot* (1994). Similarly, the theme of breath is amplified in the idea of the propulsive power of the wind which guides this vessel. The vessel, masted in all directions, is also invisibly navigating the airwaves with its message of circular linkages that bring us back to the situation of any possible message: "From this moment on, I do not need to know who or what the first dispatcher is: whatever it is, it is an island in an ocean of noise, just like me, no matter where I am."²

Notes

1. Michel Serres, "The Origin of Language: Biology, Information Theory and Thermodynamics," *Hermes: Literature, Science, Philosophy* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press), 82.
2. *Ibid.*

Drain and Plug 1996
laminated colour photographs
13 x 4 x 2 cm; 23 x 12 x 2 cm
Collection of Duff Murphy
and Janice Miyahira, Pasadena

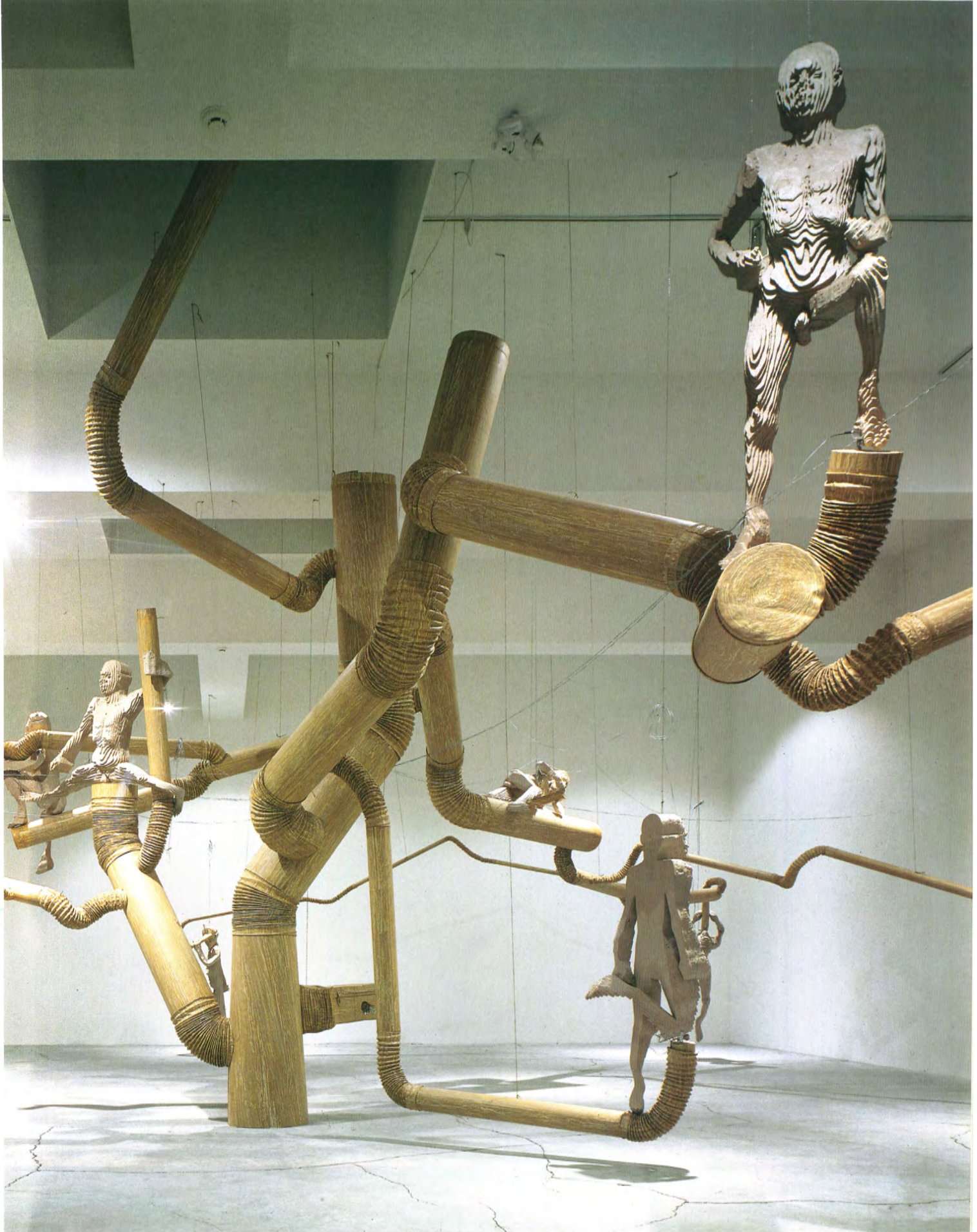


Pentecost 1999

polyurethane foam, cardboard,
mechanical components
variable dimensions

Courtesy the artist and Ace Gallery







Stamträd (Family Tree) 1997

pencil, popsicle sticks

193 cm diameter

Private collection



Shatter 1998
polyester, mylar, aluminum
213 x 213 cm
Collection of Eileen and Peter Norton, Santa Monica



Root Ball 1999 (*above*)
cardboard, paper, glue, string
203 x 152 x 86 cm
Private collection

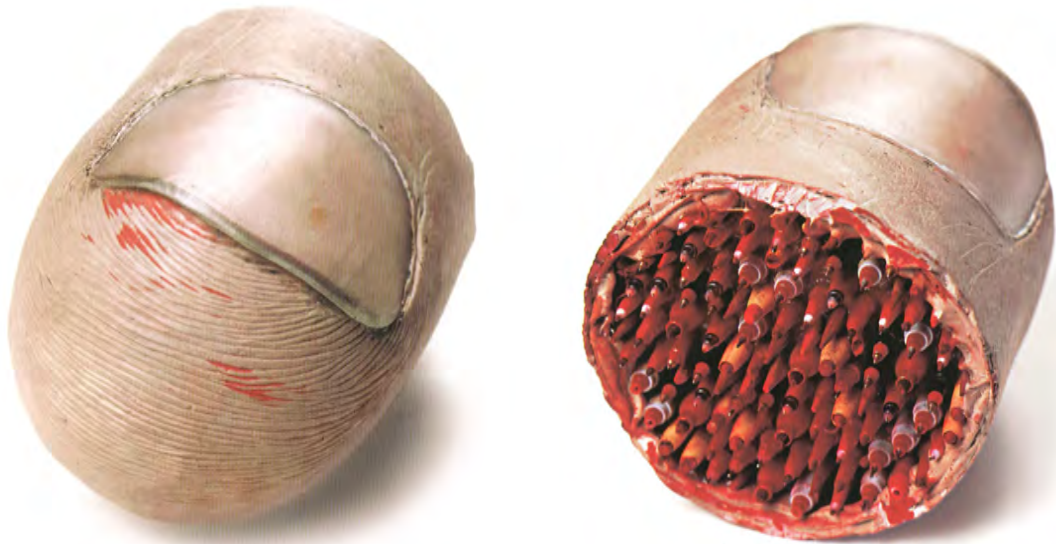
Pachyderm 1998 (*facing page*)
ink on paper on wood panel
376 x 278 cm
Collection of Tony and Gail Ganz





Wall Chart of World History
from Earliest Times to the Present 1997
pen and pencil on paper
130 x 1006 cm
Private collection



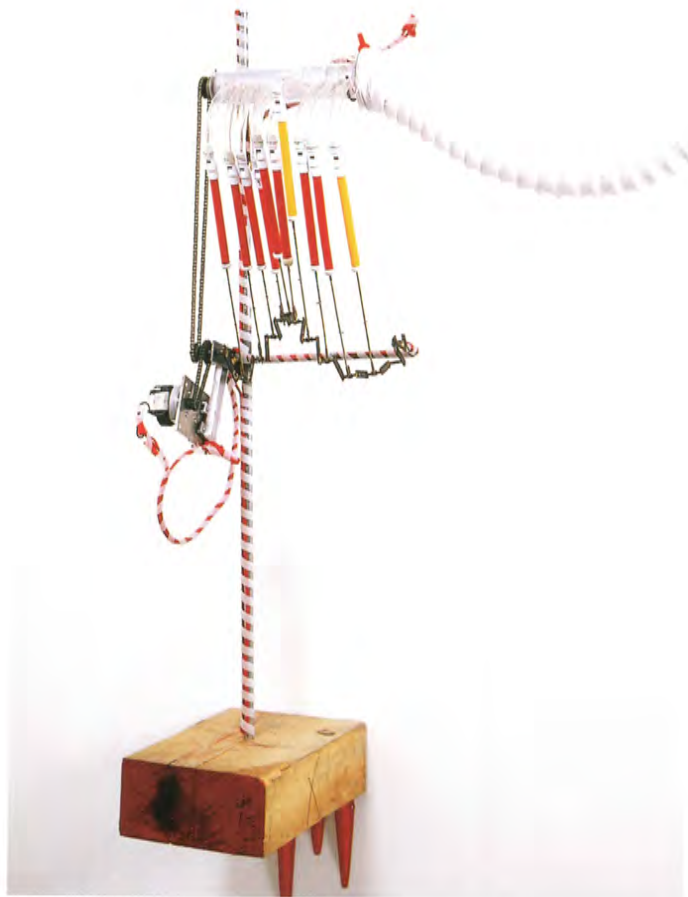


Index (Finger) 1997 *(above)*
pens, pencils, bondo
15 x 12 x 12 cm
Private collection

Graph 1999 *(facing page)*
ink on chrome-coated paper
on wood panel
366 x 244 cm
Private collection







Organ 1997 (*facing page*)
electric organ wiring, steel
112 x 130 x 74 cm
Private collection

Barber 1997 (*above*)
slide whistles, blower, mixed media, motor
178 x 48 x 27 cm
Private collection

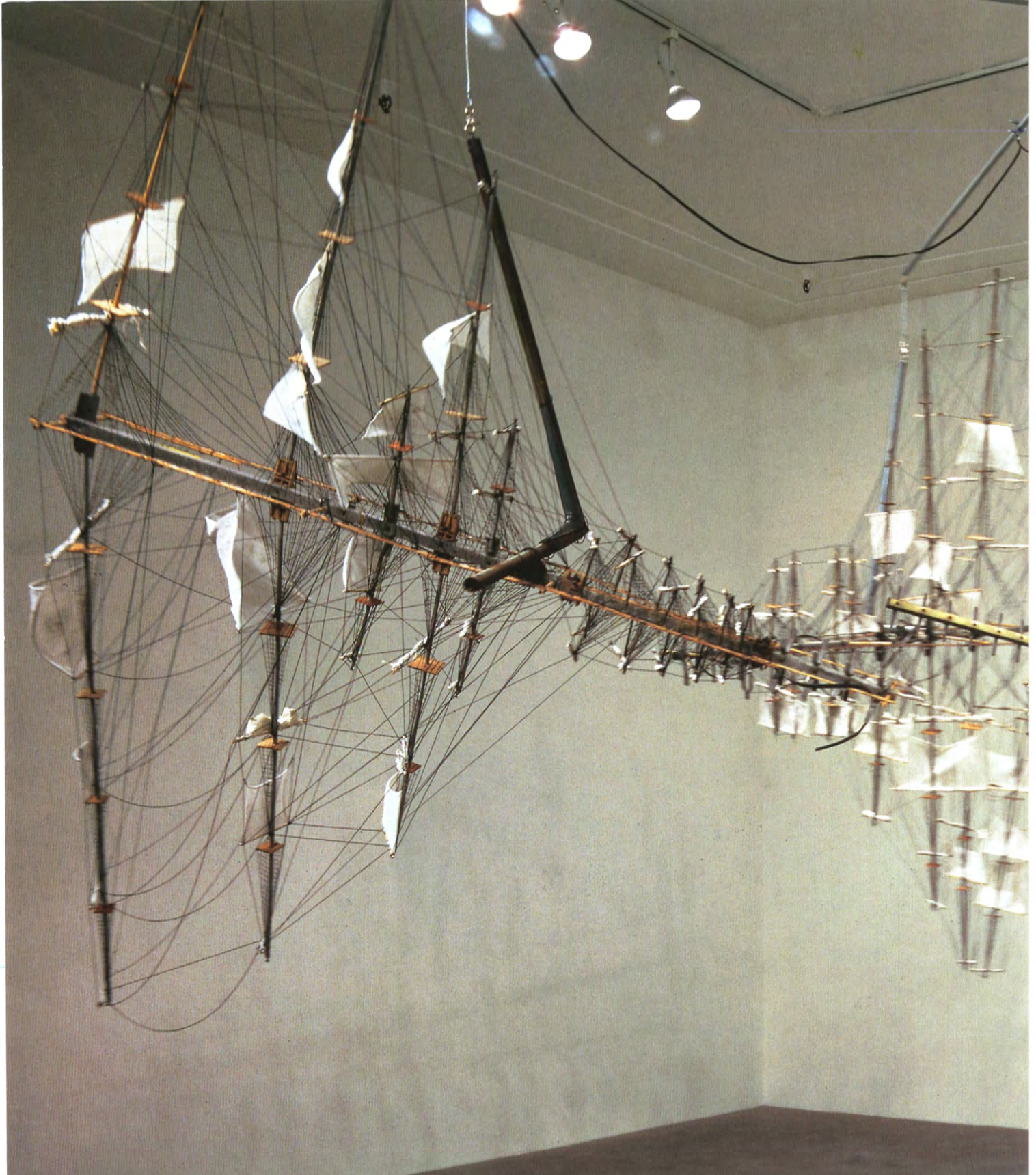


Egg 1997 (*top*)
finely ground fingernails
and hair, super glue
2.5 x 4 x 2.5 cm
Private collection

Feather 1997 (*bottom*)
hair, super glue
7 x 5 cm
Private collection

Bird 1997 (*facing page*)
fingernails, super glue
5 x 5 x 4.5 cm
Private collection

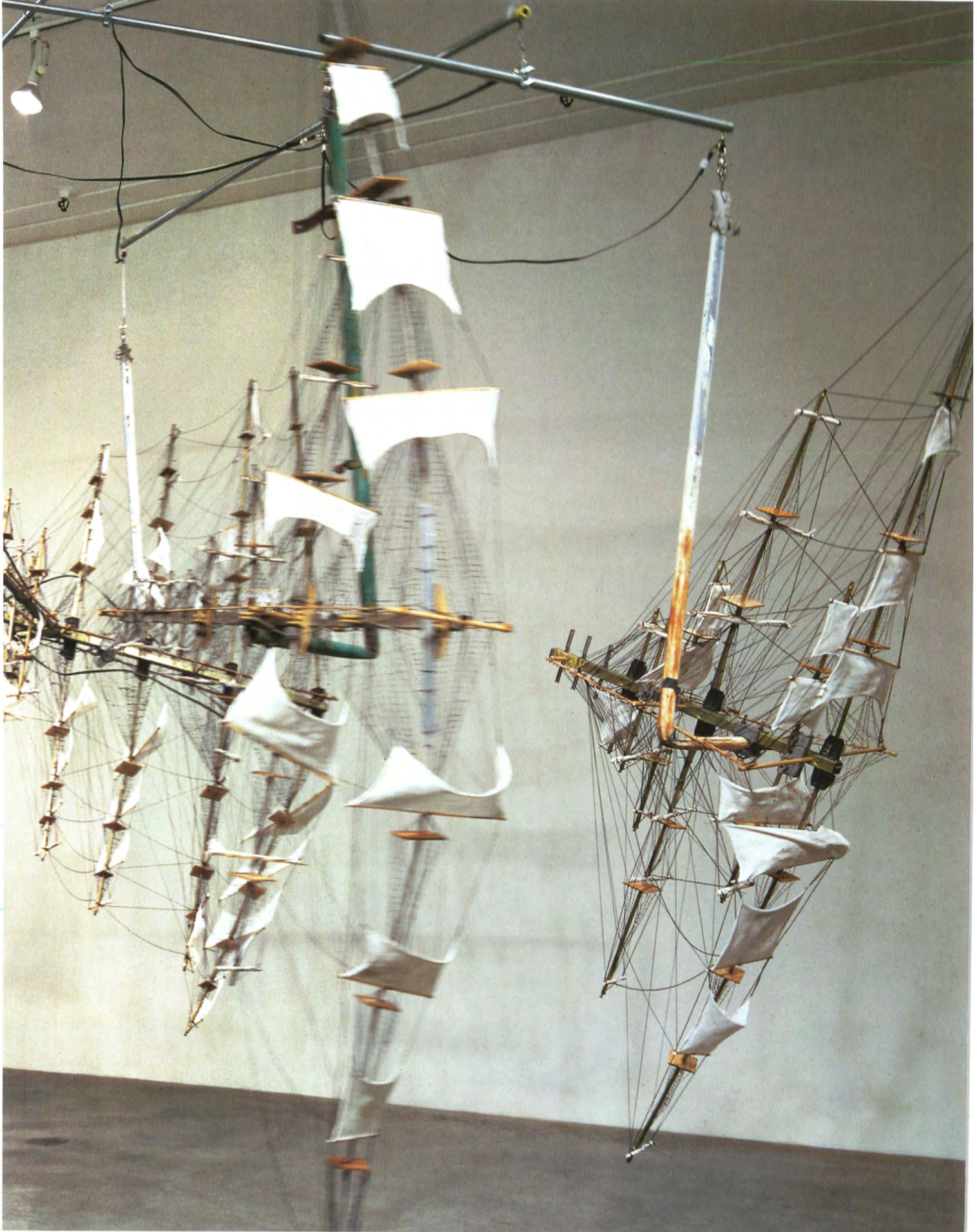


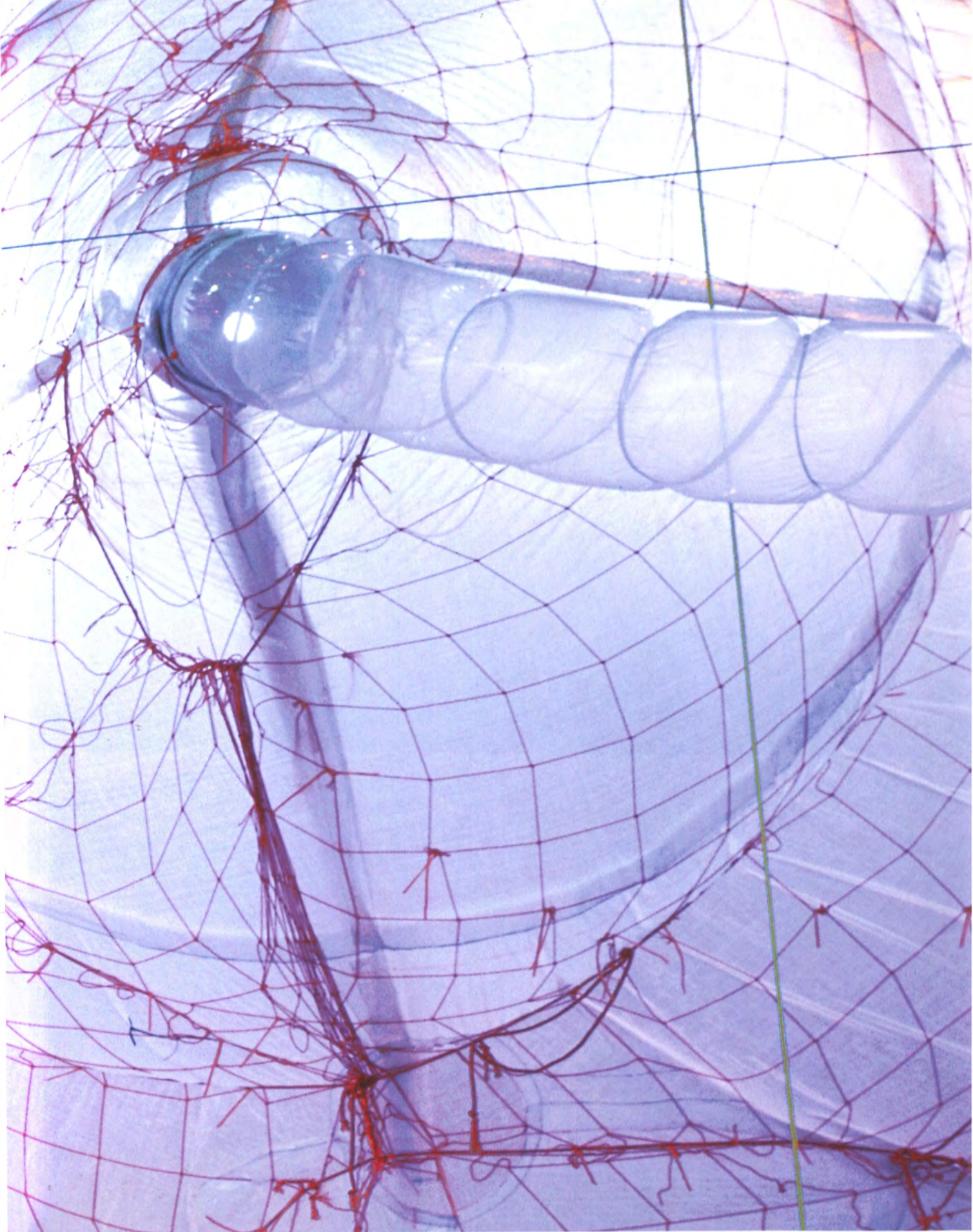


Aerial (Mobile) 1998

TV antennae, fabric, string, wood
approx. 427 x 355 cm

Collection of Eileen and Peter Norton, Santa Monica





tim hawkinson's *überorgan*

LAURA STEWARD HEON

Tim Hawkinson's *Überorgan* is a massive musical instrument, a Brobdingnagian bastard cousin of the bagpipe, the player piano and the pipe organ. The family resemblance to the bagpipe is salient: there are thirteen bus-sized inflated bags, one for each of the twelve tones in the musical scale and one udder-shaped bag that feeds air to the other twelve by long tubular ducts. Bagpipe bags were originally made from sheep bladders, a fact that the organic shapes of *Überorgan*'s bags recall. These large, lumpy forms — some hanging from the twenty-eight-foot tall trussed ceiling of the 300-foot long gallery — bring to mind several scenarios: a warehouse for misfit parade balloons deemed too uncanny for Macy's Thanksgiving Day extravaganza, or an oversized, three-dimensional version of Marcel Duchamp's *Bachelor Machine*, its bachelor moulds filled with "clarifying gas" and whose strange shapes have mysterious but highly specific meanings.

More than these scenarios, however, the gallery and its contents suggest the chest cavity and internal organs of a very large living organism. The beamed ceiling reads like a ribcage, and the translucent, biomorphic bags encapsulated in orange netting resemble unknown glands or organs delicately traced with blood vessels. *Überorgan*'s analogy to body organs continues from its visual to its sonic characteristics. Every internal organ has a particular tonal signature, a frequency with which it sympathetically resonates due to its specific shape and density. Every organism's body is, therefore, like a concert hall filled with an orchestra of organs. *Überorgan* poses (and answers) the question: what if there were a body so large that the sound of its organs could readily be heard?

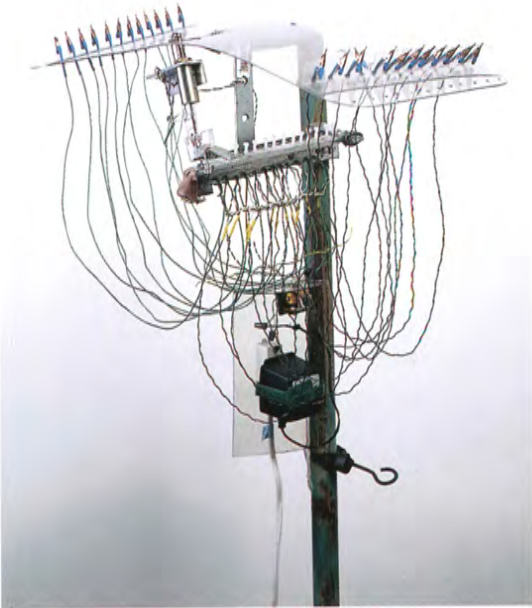
If the enormous inflated bags recall internal organs, the player-piano mechanism and its various switches form a nervous system, responding to stimuli and giving commands to the organs. In the "brain" or Player Console, a 250-foot long roll of Mylar scored with dots and dashes of black acrylic paint winds over twelve photo-electric sensors arrayed like piano keys. Each sensor gives commands to a reed assembly; each reed assembly connects an inflated bag to a twenty-five-foot long pipe. When a dot on the Mylar roll passes over a photocell, a valve in the corresponding reed assembly is opened. This results in a foghorn-like blast as the full force of the air in the bus-sized bag passes through the reed and down the pipe. The longer the brush stroke, the longer the note is held. The dots and dashes, however, are the simple part of the nervous system/player-piano console; the tricky part is the switches.

Hawkinson has made five switches for *Überorgan* that alter the quality of the note called for by the scrolling Mylar program. The first is a simple "off/on" switch triggered by a motion sensor placed at the foot of the Player Console; when someone approaches the console, the instrument begins to play. The other switches (in no particular order) are: a Key Shift Switch, which changes the key of the sound program and looks like a stack of layered concentric gears that are pushed along by a scrap of plastic; an Echo Switch, which causes every note to play twice in a row, as in a round — this is simply another set of photocells arrayed in front of the primary twelve; a Soft Sound Switch, which softens the beginnings and ends of notes, making them plaintive-sounding, and is made in part of a length of dryer hose dangling from the reed assemblies; and finally a Scale-Inverter Switch, which flip-flops the scale of the notes called for by the sound program. Twenty-four wires sprout from this switch, which rests on a five-inch tall stand, like a regal African coiffure. All of these switches are triggered by motion sensors, that is, by gallery visitors.

The mongrel *Überorgan*'s most majestic cousin is the pipe organ. The brain of the work is an organ console, and the twelve tones boom from impressive twenty-five-foot long pipes attached to each of the bags as noted earlier. The musical program is derived in large part from church hymns

typically played on a pipe organ. The title, *Überorgan*, combines philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche's *Übermensch* ("overman") with "organ," referring both to pipe and body organ, but also to the root of the word "organization." The overman is the laughing, Dionysian character who has mastered his ego and "overcome" his human pretensions and whom Nietzsche describes in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. "Man is something that shall be overcome," says Zarathustra, "All beings thus far have created something beyond themselves; and do you want to be the ebb of the great flood and even go back to the beasts rather than overcome man?" Zarathustra gives this advice on becoming the *Übermensch*: "I say unto you: one must still have chaos in oneself to be able to give birth to a dancing star. I say unto you: you still have chaos in yourselves."

So, how does this help us with the *Überorgan*? Hawkinson's hilarious, enchanting, vast instrument follows Zarathustra's model. It "overcomes" the classical pipe organ by subverting its pious grandiosity. The grand silliness of the *Überorgan*, its low-tech sophistication and handmade craftsmanship, its complexity and truly vast scale are all put in the service of a playful, mirthful, even goofy end — the *Überorgan* laughs at itself. And as for the dancing star, the *Überorgan* welcomes chaos and overcomes organization: its "brain" is composed of five switches triggered by random passers-by that radically alter the sound program and render the encoded score gloriously unpredictable and convoluted.

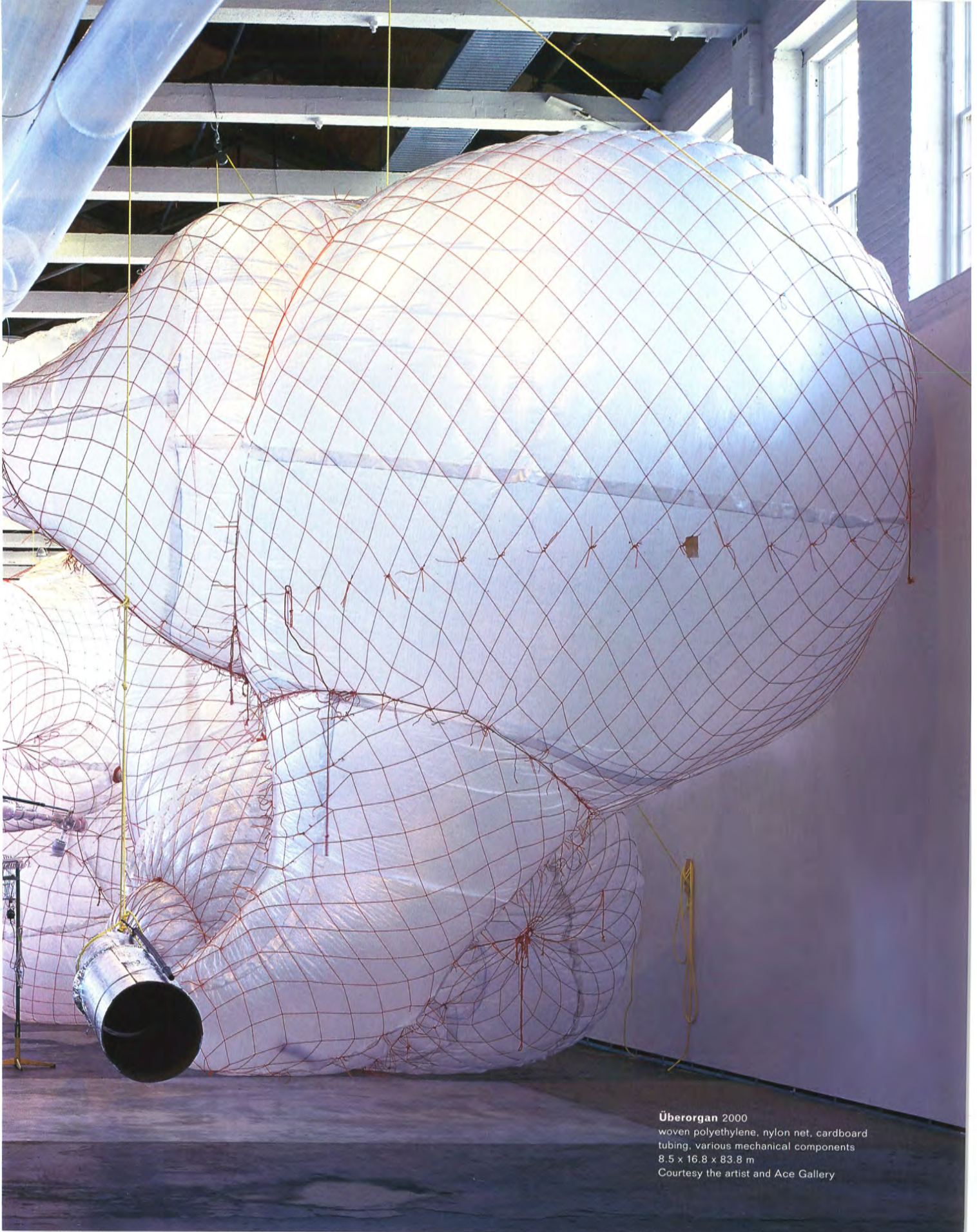


Überorgan 2000 (*details*)
woven polyethylene, nylon net,
cardboard tubing, various
mechanical components
8.5 x 16.8 x 83.8 m
Courtesy the artist and Ace Gallery

Scale-Inverter Switch (*top*)
Player Console (*bottom*)
Composer Console (*facing page*)







Überorgan 2000

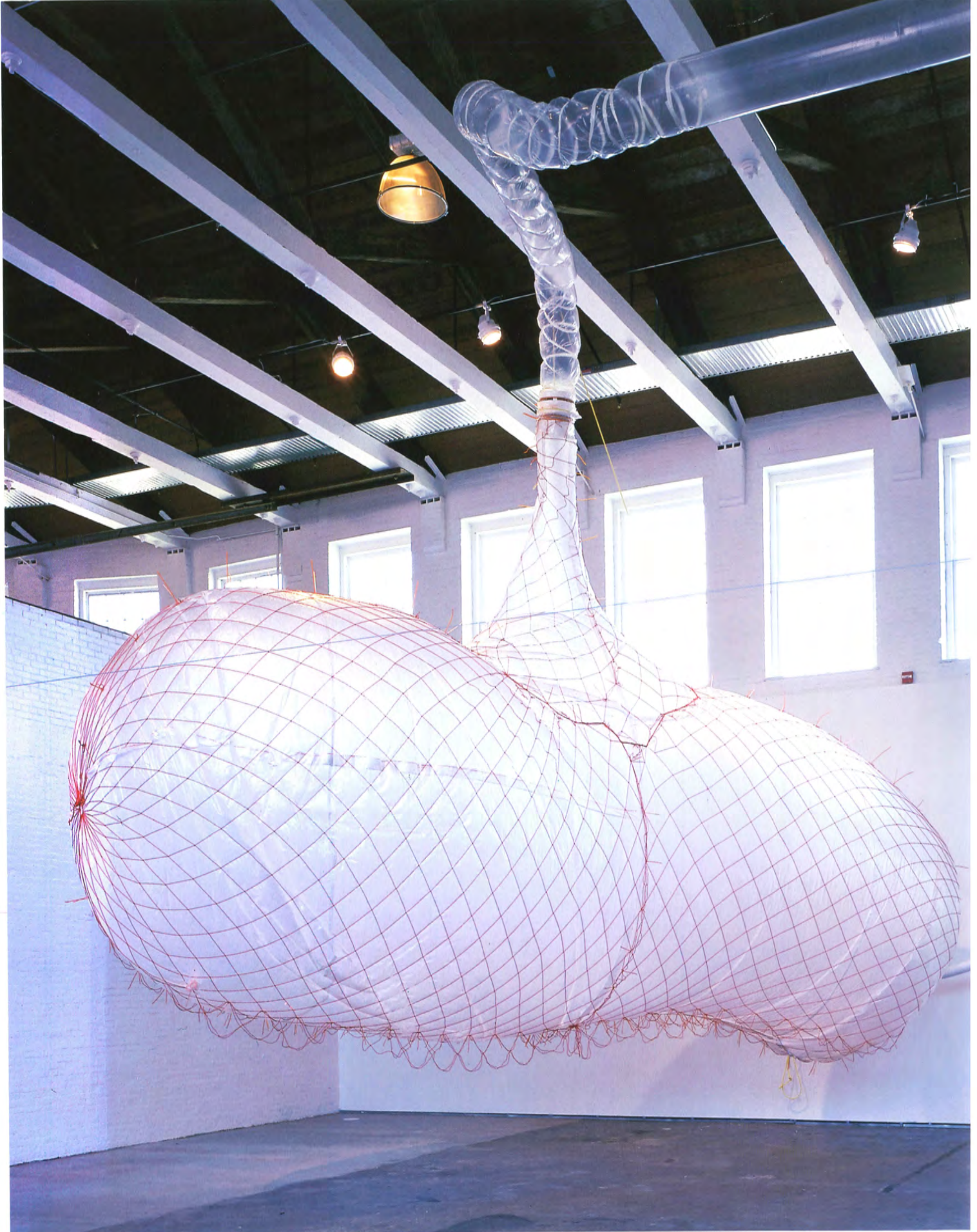
woven polyethylene, nylon net, cardboard
tubing, various mechanical components
8.5 x 16.8 x 83.8 m

Courtesy the artist and Ace Gallery





Überorgan 2000
woven polyethylene, nylon net, cardboard
tubing, various mechanical components
8,5 x 16,8 x 83,8 m
Courtesy the artist and Ace Gallery



Überorgan 2000

woven polyethylene, nylon net, cardboard tubing,
various mechanical components

8.5 x 16.8 x 83.8 m

Courtesy the artist and Ace Gallery



works in the exhibition

The Power Plant

Pentecost, 1999
polyurethane foam, cardboard,
mechanical components
variable dimensions
Courtesy the artist and Ace Gallery

Root Ball, 1999
cardboard, paper, glue, string
203 x 152 x 86 cm
Private collection
Courtesy Ace Gallery

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ink on chrome coated paper
on wood panel
366 x 244 cm
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TV antennae, fabric, string, wood
approx. 427 x 355 cm
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fingernails, super glue
5 x 5 x 4.5 cm
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Courtesy Ace Gallery

Feather, 1997
hair, super glue
7 x 5 cm
Private collection
Courtesy Ace Gallery

Drain and Plug, 1996
laminated colour photographs
13 x 4 x 2 cm; 23 x 12 x 2 cm
Collection of Duff Murphy
and Janice Miyahira, Pasadena

MASS MoCA

Überorgan, 2000
woven polyethylene, nylon net,
cardboard tubing, various
mechanical components
8.5 x 16.8 x 83.8 m
Courtesy the artist and Ace Gallery

tim hawkinson

Biography

Born 1960, San Francisco, California
Lives and works in Los Angeles

Education

1989 MFA, University of California at
Los Angeles

1984 BFA, San Jose State
University, San Jose, California

Solo Exhibitions

2000 The Power Plant, Toronto;
Überorgan, MASS MoCA, North
Adams; Miyake Design Studio, Tokyo;
Pentecost, Ace Contemporary
Exhibitions, Los Angeles; Ace Gallery,
Mexico City; White Cube/Jay Jopling,
London

1999 Akira Ikeda Gallery, Aig
Exhibition, Taura, Japan; Ace Gallery,
New York

1998 Galleria Milleventi, Milan;
Ace Contemporary Exhibitions,
Los Angeles; *The Pneumatic Quilt*,
Collaboration with Issey Miyake,
Ace Contemporary Exhibitions,
Los Angeles

1997 *Secret Sync*, Ace
Contemporary Exhibitions, Los
Angeles; Southeast Center for
Contemporary Art, Winston-Salem,
North Carolina; John Michael Kohler
Arts Center, Sheboygan, Wisconsin

1996 Armory Center for the Arts,
Pasadena; Yerba Buena Center for
the Arts, San Francisco; *Secret Sync*,
Gallery Paule Anglim, San Francisco;
Akron Museum of Art, Akron, Ohio;
Cincinnati Contemporary Art Center,
Cincinnati; Ace Contemporary
Exhibitions, Los Angeles

1995 Ace Gallery, New York

1994 Guggenheim Art Gallery,
Chapman University, Orange,
California

1993 Ace Contemporary Exhibitions,
Los Angeles

1991 Anders Tornberg Gallery, Lund,
Sweden

1990 Ace Contemporary Exhibitions,
Los Angeles

1988 Ace Contemporary Exhibitions,
Los Angeles

1985 Brunswick Gallery, Missoula,
Montana

1984 Gallery 6, San Jose State
University, San Jose

1982 Freight Door Gallery, Santa
Clara University, Santa Clara

1981 Carlson Tower Gallery, Chicago

Selected Group Exhibitions

2000 *The Greenhouse Effect*, The
Serpentine Gallery, London

1999 *Zero Gravity*, Whitney Museum
of American Art, Stamford,
Connecticut; *48th Venice Biennale*,
Venice; *Head to Toe: Impressing the
Body*, University of Massachusetts at
Amherst; Los Angeles Municipal Art
Gallery, Los Angeles; *Persona*,
Carousel, Paris

1998 *Etre Nature*, Fondation Cartier
pour L'art Contemporain, Paris; *Deep
Thought*, Basilico Fine Art, New York

1997 *Yard Sale*, Special K
Exhibitions, Los Angeles; Milwaukee
Art Museum, Milwaukee

1996 *Narcissism*, California Center
for the Arts Museum, Escondido; *First
Person*, Marc Foxx Gallery, Santa
Monica; *Nordic Biennale*, Arken
Museum of Modern Art, Copenhagen,
Denmark; *Portrait*, Rosamund Felsen
Gallery, Santa Monica; *The
Empowered Object*, Hunsaker/
Schlesinger Fine Art, Santa Monica;
*Shirts and Skins: The Absent Figure
in Contemporary Art*, The
Contemporary Museum, Honolulu

1995 *In the Black*, Irvine Fine Arts
Center, Irvine, California; *Beyond 15
Minutes*, Cheney Cowles Museum,
Spokane; *California in Three
Dimensions*, California Center for the
Arts Museum, Escondido; *Veered
Science*, Huntington Beach Art
Center, Huntington Beach, California

1994 *Current Abstractions*, Los
Angeles Municipal Art Gallery,
Barnsdall Artpark, Los Angeles; *This
is My Body*, Greg Kucera Gallery,
Seattle; *Hooked on a Feeling*, Kohn
Turner Gallery, Los Angeles

1992 *Imperfect Order*, Irvine Fine
Arts Center, Irvine, California

1991 *Evocative Objects*, California
State University, Los Angeles

1990 Michael Kohn Gallery, Los Angeles; *Lead & Wax*, Stephen Wirtz Gallery, San Francisco

1989 *Self Evident*, Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions, Los Angeles; *Modern Objects*, Richard/Bennett Gallery, Los Angeles

1988 *Excavations*, Otis Parsons, Los Angeles; *Profound Visions*, Ace Contemporary Exhibitions, Los Angeles; *Group Show*, Curt Marcus Gallery, New York

1987 *Group Show*, Livestock, Los Angeles; *Young American Artists V*, Mandeville Gallery, San Diego; *Two Person Show*, Vorpel Gallery, San Francisco

1986 *Dimensional Abstract Painting*, Richmond Art Center, Richmond, California; *All-California 86 On a Small Scale*, Laguna Art Museum, Laguna Beach, California

1985 *New Art in the West*, Vorpel Gallery, San Francisco; *Paint in Space*, Main Gallery, San Jose State University, San Jose; *Coming Attractions*, San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art, San Jose

1984 *Painted, Tinted, Tainted Sculpture*, San Jose Museum of Art, San Jose

1983 *Painted Constructions*, Main Gallery, San Jose State University, San Jose

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Desmarais, Charles. *Humongolous: Sculpture and Other Works by Tim Hawkinson*. Cincinnati: Contemporary Arts Center, 1996.

Monk, Philip et al. *Tim Hawkinson*. Toronto: The Power Plant and North Adams: MASS MoCA, 2000.

Rinder, Larry. *Self Evidence*. Los Angeles: Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions, 1989.

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Auerbach, Lisa Anne. "Nothing is Real: Inside Tim Hawkinson's Fertile Imagination." *L.A. Reader*. 19 July 1996, 14.

Baker, Kenneth. "Hawkinson's Inventions More Than Hot Air." *San Francisco Chronicle*, 24 September 1996, E1.

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Curtis, Cathy. "A Show Mr. Wizard Would Be Proud Of." *Los Angeles Times*, 15 August 1995.

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Decter, Joshua. "Tim Hawkinson: Ace Gallery." *Artforum* 34 (February 1996): 85.

Denton, Monroe. "Tim Hawkinson: The Body in Space." *Art International* 28 (March-April 1996): 176-195.

DiMichele, David. "More Questions: Tim Hawkinson at Ace Contemporary Exhibitions." *Artweek* 24, 5 August 1993, back cover.

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Drohjowska-Philp, Hunter. "Tim Hawkinson: A Tinkerer's Darnedest." *Los Angeles Times*, Calendar Section, 23 June 1996, 55-56.

Drohjowska, Hunter. "Tim Hawkinson: Concrete Metaphors." *Artnews* 88 (December 1989): 109-110.

Dubin, Zan. "Technology Made Accessible in 'Veered'." *Los Angeles Times*, Calendar Section, 5 July 1995.

Duncan, Michael. "Recycling the Self." *Art in America* 85 (May 1997): 112-115.

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_____. "Tim Hawkinson." *Art Issues* (September-October 1993): 44.

Frank, Peter. "Pale Males." *L.A. Weekly*, 26 July-1 August 1996, 38.

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Friedman, Terri. "Tim Hawkinson: Ace, New York." *Zingmagazine* (November 1995): 215-216.

Gates, Susan. "The Buzz 100 Coolest People in L.A." *Buzz Magazine* (October 1995).

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Grayson, Matthew Miles. "The Eye of Hawkinson." *Detour Magazine* (September 1993): 88-90.

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