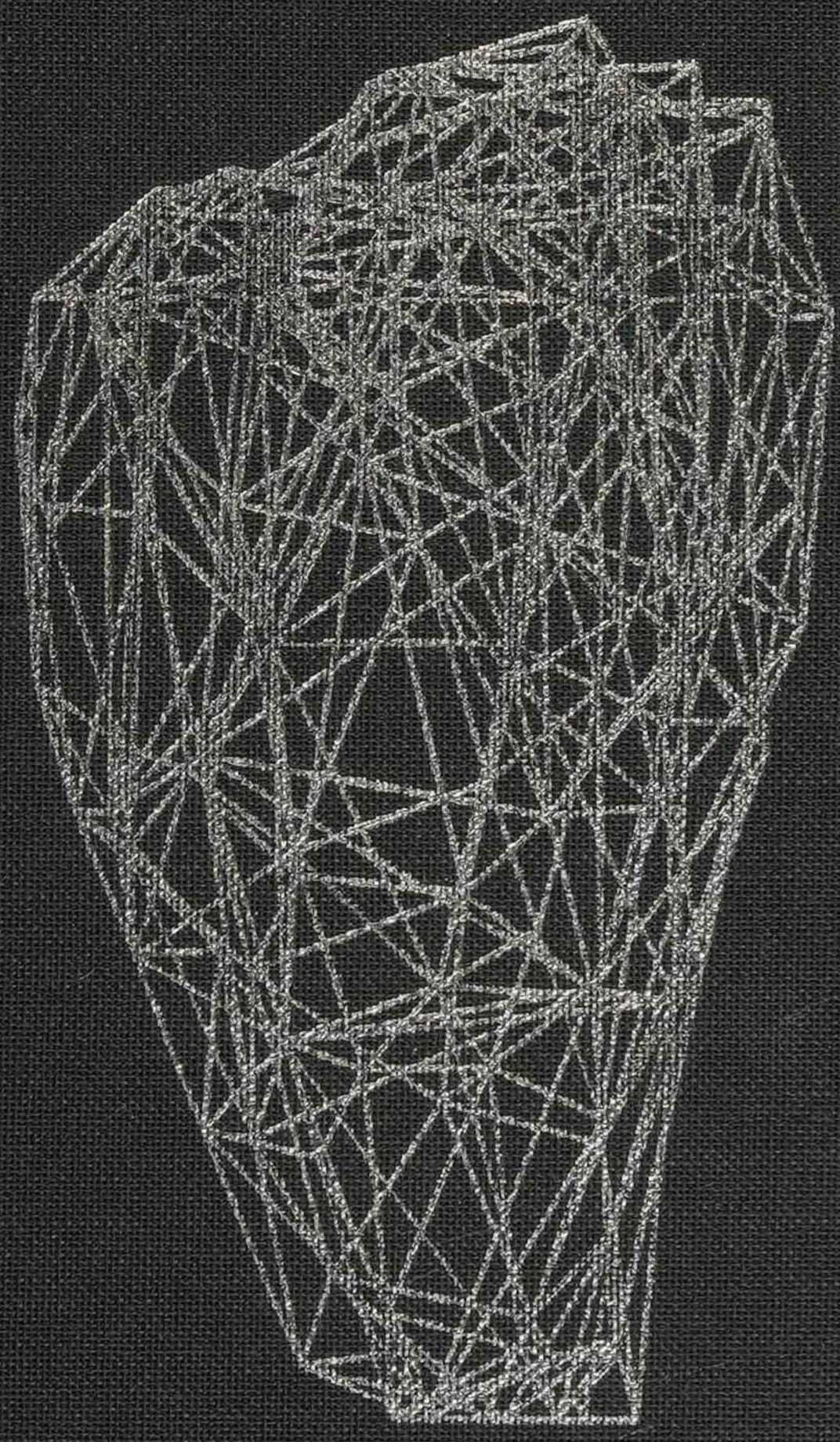
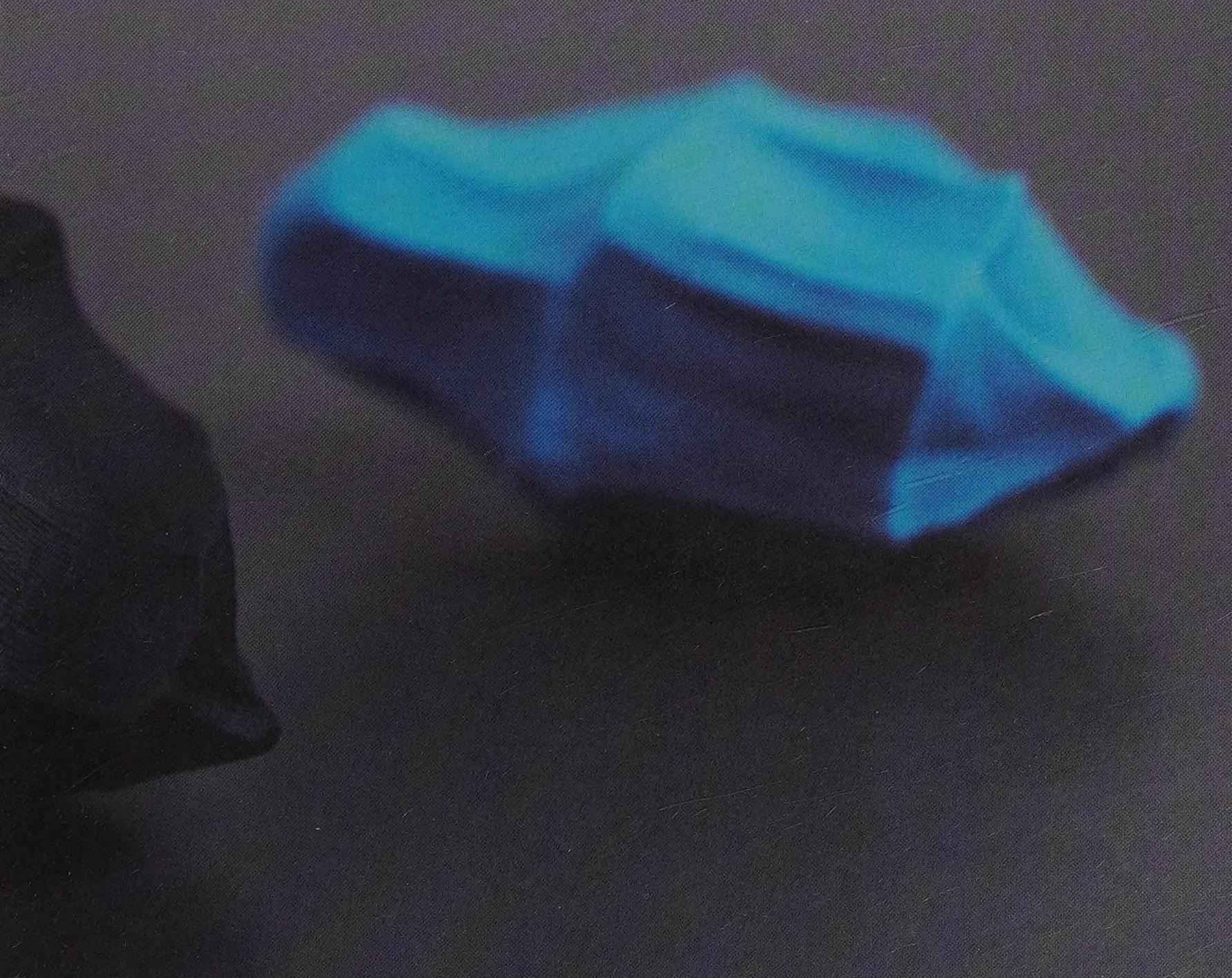
Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle: Blinking Out of Existence





Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle: Blinking Out of Existence

Rochester Art Center
June 23 – September 3, 2006



This publication
accompanies the exhibition
Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle:
Blinking Out of Existence

Curator
Kris Douglas

Presented at
Rochester Art Center
June 23 – September 3, 2006

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Iceberg number r11i01 in the Labrador Sea off the coast of
Newfoundland, June 2004. Photographs by Julia Hechtman.

Page 31: Photograph by Julia Hechtman.

Images presented as figures within the essay sections
courtesy of the artist and Max Protetch Gallery, New York.



ROCHESTER **ART** CENTER

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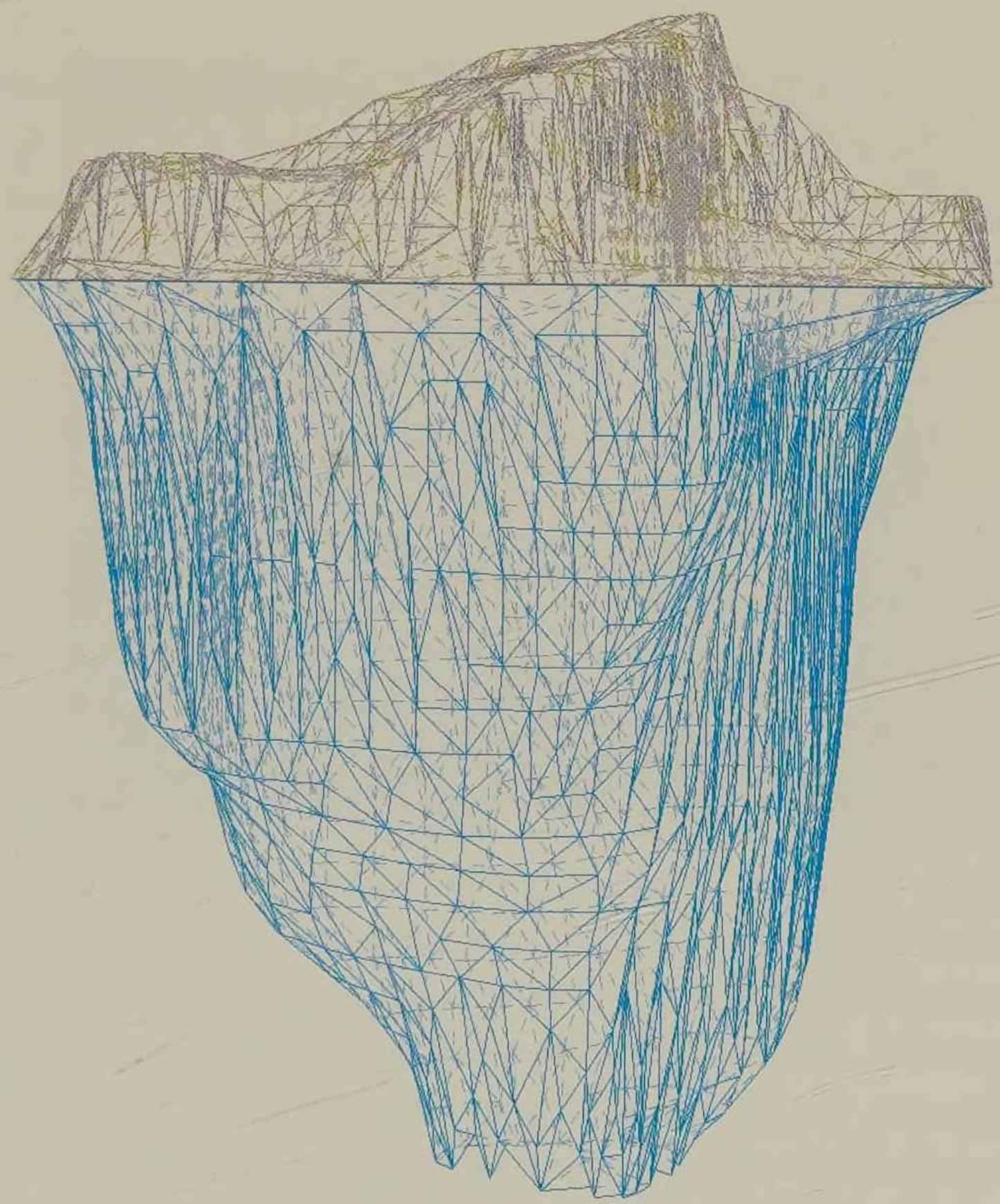

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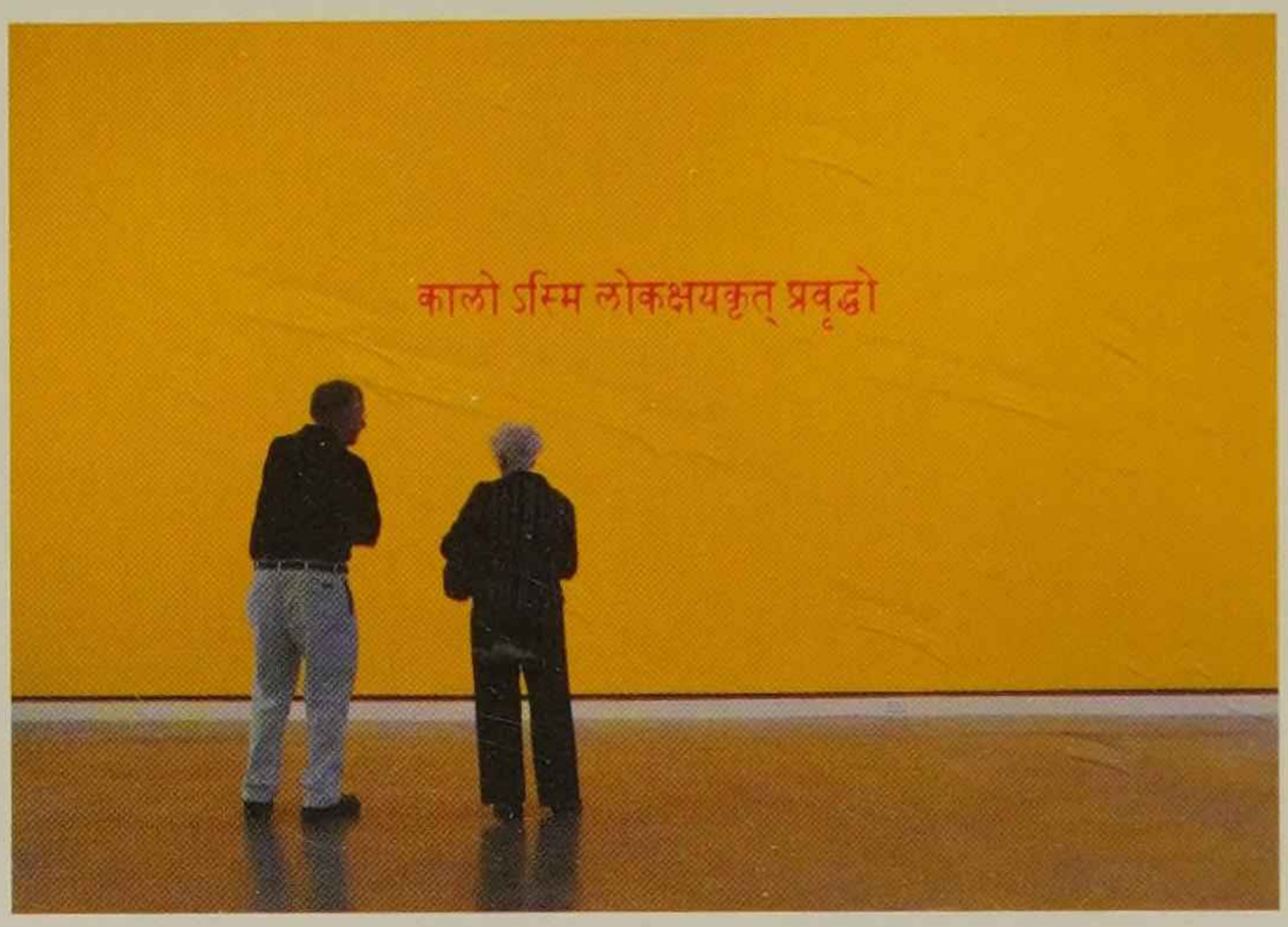

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Forward.

Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle: Blinking Out of Existence is a pivotal exhibition in the 60-year history of the Rochester Art Center. It is not only the largest scale exhibition in the organization's history, it is also one of the most deeply layered in concept and content and one that perfectly delivers on the Art Center's mission of introducing regional audiences to contemporary art.

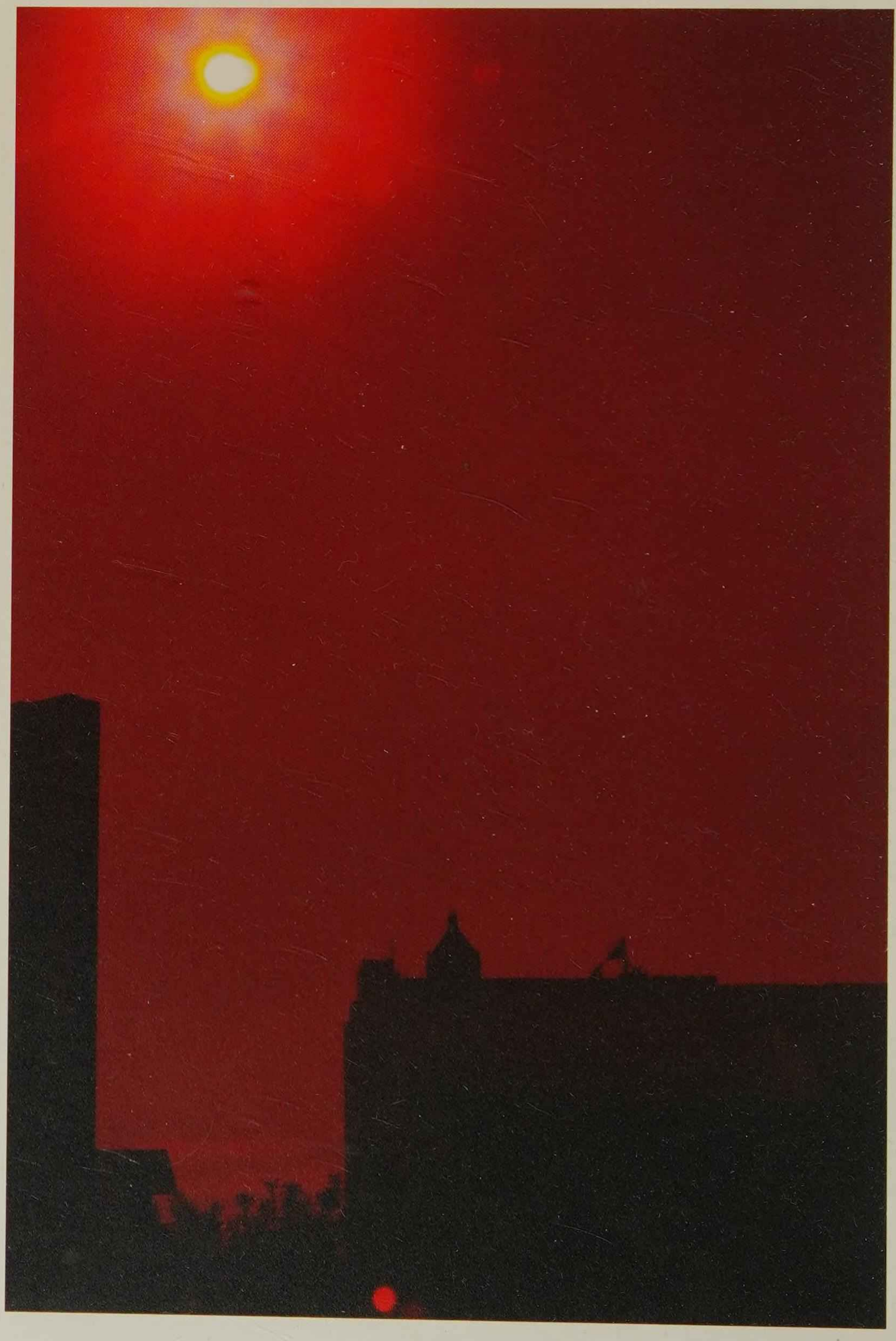
Rochester, Minnesota is the economic hub of the southeastern Minnesota region. As the headquarters of the internationally recognized Mayo Clinic and a major research and manufacturing center for IBM, Rochester is an anomaly. Corn and soy fields bleed into the city's edges while state-of-the-art genomics research centers are being built only miles away in the city's center. Rochester's population represents both the agrarian history of the region and the future of medicine and technology internationally. It is a population that is just as interested in the fluctuations of the weather as it is in the speed that a super-processor might map a sample of DNA.

It is in this context that presenting the work of Manglano-Ovalle was incredibly appealing to us. Chief Curator Kris Douglas initiated conversations with the artist by mocking up an image of *Cloud Prototype no. 1* installed in the Art Center's atrium. The idea of a single piece quickly evolved into an exhibition in our large gallery, which evolved into the first exhibition that has occupied all the gallery space on the Art Center's second floor. In its final state, Blinking Out of Existence is Minnesota's first major presentation of Manglano-Ovalle's work and one that explores the ideas that have captivated the artist for more than a decade. Audience reaction to the exhibition has been fascinating. From area teens lying on the gallery floor to experience the peaceful yet disturbing *Sonambulo II (blue)*, to engineers and scientists examining the methodology behind *Portrait of a Young Reader* or *Recumbent Iceberg (r11i01)*, Manglano-Ovalle's work proves deeply engaging on several levels—those of emotion, immediacy, intellect, and awe.

This exhibition would not have been possible without the generous support of Rochester Transfer and Storage Co., as well as the members of the Rochester Art Center's 60th Anniversary Founders Circle. The National Endowment for the Arts provided support for this exhibition catalogue as well as the publication of a bilingual gallery guide. I also extend special thanks to the members of the Art Center's staff for their tremendous dedication in realizing the vision for this exhibition, with particular recognition for Chief Curator, Kris Douglas, Curator of Education, Scott Stulen, and Exhibition Preparator, Phillip Ahnen.

The ability for a small institution in the Midwest to sustain programs at this level is directly related to the talent of its staff and the support of its donors. At the close of our 60th year, I am proud to announce that the Rochester Art Center is beginning to fulfill its founder's vision to "make Rochester a cultural center worthy of its scientific achievements."

Denise R. Sorom, *Executive Director*



Acknowledgements.

Following a series of discussions with Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle regarding the exhibition of a single work, the decision was made to proceed in an entirely new direction and develop a more comprehensive exhibition ultimately utilizing all of the galleries at the Rochester Art Center. As a consequence, a specifically designed exhibition of new and recent work was conceived. This publication documents the exhibition, considers the key themes therein, and provides a general overview of Manglano's-Ovalle's unique and multi-faceted approach to art making.

I am sincerely appreciative of the contributions made by numerous individuals involved in the realization of this exhibition. Without the generous support and assistance of many colleagues and friends, neither the exhibition nor this accompanying publication would have come to fruition. In particular, I would like to thank Denise Sorom, Executive Director of the Rochester Art Center, for her ongoing commitment and contributions to the development of this project.

I am truly indebted to the entire staff of the Rochester Art Center, with special thanks to Philip Ahnen, Exhibition Preparator, for his thoughtful attention to detail and exemplary organization and oversight of the installation; to Scott Stulen, Curator of Education, for his efforts in extending the exhibition to a wider and more diverse audience; and to Kathryn Ross, Development Director, for her exceptional work in securing the resources that ultimately made this exhibition possible. Many thanks also go to Luis Alonzo-Barkigia, Chris Deo, Edward Charbonneau and Julia Weist for their assistance with a challenging installation. I would also like to recognize Max Protetch, Josie Browne, Hesse McGraw, Chris Davidson and Eli Ping Weinberg at Max Protetch Gallery for their willingness to accommodate a multitude of requests and to assist in the organization of many important details. I am also profoundly grateful to the Maxine and Stuart Frankel Foundation for Art and the The Art Institute of Chicago for lending important works to the exhibition.

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to Yasmil Raymond and Claire Barliant for their thoughtful contributions to this publication and their feedback and guidance during the development of this exhibition. Designer Kindra Murphy and photographer Gene Pittman were invaluable in the production of this publication, skillfully echoing the exhibition's installation. I thank Tyler Cufley, assistant to Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle, for his tireless work and dedication to every aspect of this undertaking. I am further indebted to Jacque Liu, Nora Riccio, Mark Hereld and Richard Paul Gribenas for their assistance with many particulars, and to Tom Morton, who's essay *The Name of the Game* provided the title for this exhibition.

Finally, I must thank Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle for his intellectual insights, spirit of collaboration, and extraordinary vision. It has been a genuine privilege to work with an artist so deeply interested in interpreting the multiple conditions that define our world.

Kris Douglas, *Chief Curator*

Detail of ***Cloud Prototype no. 1,*** 2003

Hold Yourself in Mid Air

Claire Barliant

> And they departed from the mount of the Lord three days' journey: and the ark of the covenant of the Lord went before them in the three days' journey, to search out a resting place for them. And the cloud of the Lord was upon them by day, when they went out of the camp.
>
> Numbers, 10: 33, 10:34 [1]

When the Israelites departed for their forty-year exodus, they were accustomed to farming by diverting rivers to irrigate the dry plains of Egypt. So as the half-million people moved from the lowlands to the semi-arid zones of Sinai and Canaan, they were surprised to find annual rainfall averages of more than fifteen inches. Is it any wonder that God should have appeared to them in the form of a cloud, reassuring them of their slow progress toward freedom? Simultaneously signaling mobility and the arrival of much-needed water, God as a swiftly moving cloud encouraged them to continue toward the promised land of Israel. [2]

Aristotle saw clouds as harbingers of change.[3] For nomadic peoples, the indication of change would be expected. A more localized wanderer, Baudelaire's *flaneur*, looked to the drifting shapes in the heavens for constancy, seeing in their fleecy meanderings an affirmation of his own peripatetic tendencies. Since Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle questions the legitimacy and limitations of boundaries, it is appropriate that the cloud has become a fixture in his visual vocabulary.

Clouds first appeared in the artist's work in 1997, when he created *The El Niño Effect* Fig. 1 during a residency at ArtPace in San Antonio, Texas. He built a New Age spa within the gallery, complete with two isolation tanks, changing rooms, and two television monitors playing identical videos of moving clouds. The entire installation, according to the artist, used the peregrinations of clouds and warm water to discuss a "politics of xenophobia." The video, filmed by the artist in Nogales, Arizona, is titled *Wind Shear*, and the clouds are identified as hovering between the United States and Mexico. In an interview, the artist said:

> The shot is of these beautiful clouds in a state of "shearing," which means they are moving contrary to each other at different elevations, so they're crossing the border both from north to south, and south to north...The clouds are nomadic bodies free of political boundaries. They become a metaphor for freedom, in that they represent the incapability of political or national boundaries to stop large climatic movements, or social ones such as immigration. [4]



Fig. 1. *Niño and Niña* (from *The El Niño Effect*), 1998
Color photograph laminated to Plexiglas
40 x 60 inches

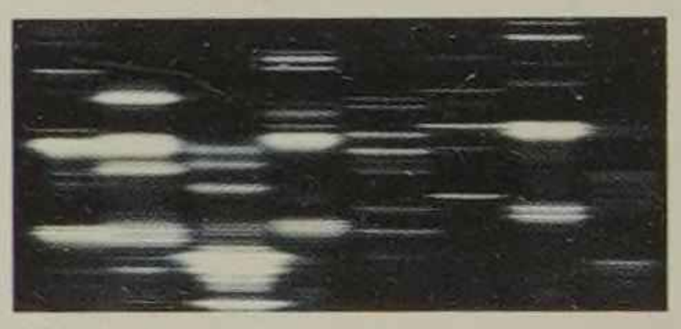


Fig. 2. *Heavenly Bodies* (Anna Kustera), 2003
Archival watercolor inkjet on Province watercolor paper
30 x 65 inches



Fig. 3. *Heavenly Bodies* (Lori Lightfoot), 2003
Archival watercolor inkjet on Province watercolor paper
30 x 65 inches



Fig. 4. *Heavenly Bodies* (Joe Picket), 2003
Archival watercolor inkjet on Province watercolor paper
30 x 65 inches

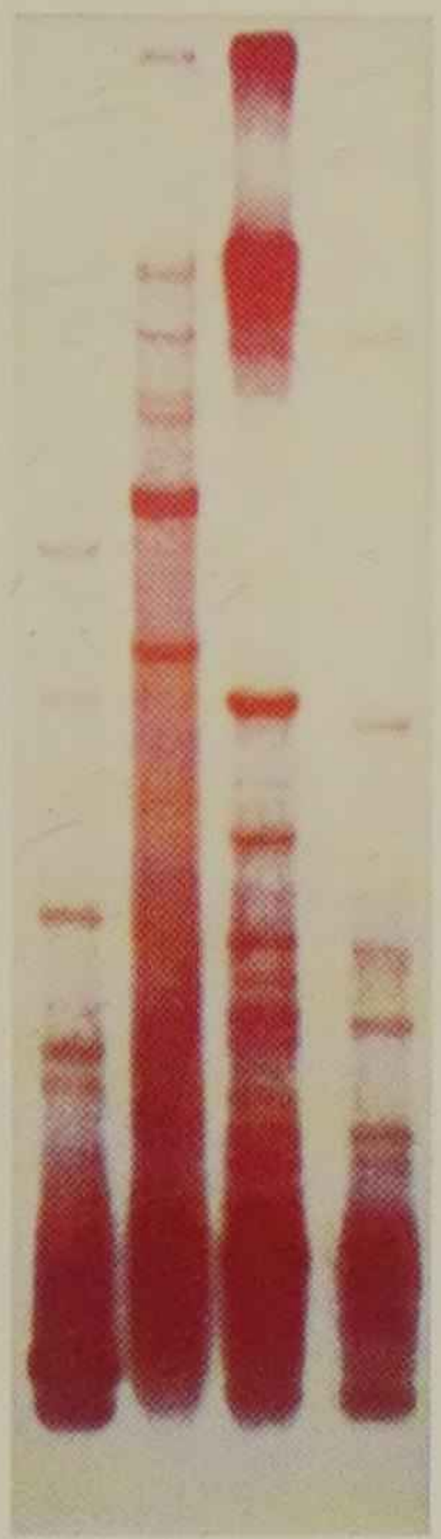


Fig. 5. ***Rose (Detail)*, 1995**
Three color photographs laminated to Plexiglas
40 x 12 inches each,
120 x 36 inches overall

Heavenly Bodies (2003), a suite of nine digital prints on watercolor paper, is one of Manglano-Ovalle's works elaborating on the cloud motif. Using DNA "fingerprints" scanned into his computer, Manglano-Ovalle took strands of indisputable evidence proclaiming the genetic predispositions of various people toward blue eyes, brown eyes, black hair, bushy eyebrows, large noses, and so on. He then transposed these rows of vaporous markings onto different celestial backgrounds. The prints collapse the opposite experiences of looking up into the endless sky and looking down into a microscope to examine the minute and astonishing evidence of human existence. To distinguish one print from another, the titles each include the name of the subject volunteering his or her DNA to the project. In *Heavenly Bodies (Anna Kustera)*,[Fig. 2] Anna's vibrating white blobs of chromosomes are tinged with aquamarine, resembling UFOs hovering in the night. Lori Lightfoot's[Fig. 3] evolutionary make-up contrasts sharply with a field of deep blue evoking the vaulted sky of Montana. Joe Picket's[Fig. 4] genes almost fade away completely, enveloped by a moody, overcast realm —perhaps in Chicago, the artist's hometown.

A Rose

"Genetics can deliver certainty that other forms of representation couldn't before," Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle is saying. We are sitting in a compact, clean office built as a loft inside his studio—a studio so white and pristine it could be a laboratory. "Certainty," I gradually come to realize during the interview, is a term the artist regards with little trust. The more "certain" something is, the more likely it is to be circumscribed by rules and regulations. As an artist for whom political concerns are paramount, challenging "certainty" has become enmeshed in Manglano-Ovalle's art making.

Manglano-Ovalle's first choice of a subject for a DNA portrait was a tea rose.[Fig. 5] Not an ordinary tea rose, but a hybrid that his wife, Barbara Holbert, created and grew in their garden in Chicago. After the O.J. Simpson trial of 1995, the artist immediately began to question the cultural significance of DNA evidence that was airtight and objective, especially under racially charged circumstances. The artist took a sample from the rose and had it sent to the same lab in Baltimore that processed Simpson's DNA. After receiving the results, Manglano-Ovalle blew up the image digitally and colored it, entitling the triptych

of photographic images simply *Rose*. Each panel is identical, consisting of four columns of DNA. The base of each column is a deep pink hue, which quickly lightens until the color is almost transparent as it reaches the top of the frame. Once the piece had been made, he and his wife destroyed the flower, so that it only existed in the form of a portrait.

Manglano-Ovalle deliberately selected a rose for its symbolic weight, conveying as it does messages of truth, beauty, and love. But his rose was a hybrid—impure. By conventional standards, it was a monster. With the picture of these mutant genes, he reminds us that genetic engineering is not new—and our ready leap to judge people on questionable evidence, whether we are looking at a photograph or an abstract smear for scientific purposes, also endures. Manglano-Ovalle's work reveals how popular reception of scientific discoveries shapes the way in which we view what surrounds us, and what is inside us.

"I know of nothing sublime which is not some modification of power," philosopher Edmund Burke wrote in 1757. [5] Few modern symbols are more indicative of power than the double helix we now recognize as DNA. Completely invisible to the human eye, and as remote to us as the stars in outer space, it is regularly held up as a beacon for a future in which human potential exceeds the most ambitious expectations. Burke cites the diminutive as a source of the sublime equal to vastness:

> As the great extreme of dimension is sublime, so the last extreme of littleness is in some measure sublime likewise; when we attend to the infinite divisibility of matter, when we pursue animal life into these excessively small, and yet organized beings, that escape the nicest inquisition of the sense, when we push our discoveries yet smaller, and the still diminishing scale of existence, in tracing which the imagination is lost as well as the sense, we become amazed and confounded at the wonders of minuteness; nor can we distinguish in its effect this extreme of littleness from the vast itself. [6]

In resounding testimony to the mystery of our own physical essence, David exclaims in the book of *Psalms*, "I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made." [7] In *Heavenly Bodies*, the complexity of human existence is vividly reflected in images of the celestial realm.

By any other name...

In *The Invention of Clouds*, a biography of English pharmacist Luke Howard, who gave the names cirrus, stratus, cumulus, and nimbus to the cloud formations, author Richard Hamblyn writes that meteorology is "a search for narrative order among events governed not by laws alone, but by the shapeless caprices of the atmosphere." [8] This is a crucial reference point for Manglano-Ovalle, because Hamblyn compares weather to language: "Weather writes, erases and rewrites itself upon the sky with the endless fluidity of language; and it is with language that we have sought throughout history to apprehend it." [9]

The idea that "naming" a thing controls it is a prevailing theme in Manglano-Ovalle's art. In an essay that interprets Manglano-Ovalle's work through the writings of Michel Foucault, "Beyond Limits and Frontiers," critic and curator Ralph Christofori points out that both the philosopher and the artist are careful not to assume a "posture of rejection *a priori*" toward modernism, that instead, the artist "elevates real relationships to the level of reflective criticism without falling into the trap of passionate implausibility." Manglano-Ovalle's works, Christofori continues, "lead the observer through aesthetical, political or epistemological strata without explicitly mentioning their limits or contradictions." [10]

The discourse of power, as elaborated by Foucault, is not strictly limited to "attack" and "counter-attack," but is instead multivalent, allowing contradictory discourses to reside under the same rubric. Refusing to take a stance on any of the organizing factors—modernist architecture, genetic science, technology—that serve as structural bases for much of his art, Manglano-Ovalle insists that his art is only the beginning of the equation:

> Art has the possibility to have an impact on a broader culture once it initiates a discursive practice. We get to talk and debate. That's where it really exists. It has been a way to catalyze discourse. If you made a portrait and never showed it to anybody, it wouldn't exist. In the political aspect of my work, social change occurs in language itself. We might cause a new term to be developed. Similarly, this is how science has the most change on our culture, through discourse. On a discursive level, scientific developments have a real impact in shaping everyday and social events. [11]

"There are two meanings of the word 'subject'," wrote Foucault, "subject to someone else by control and dependence; and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge." [12] Yet once the subject is "tied to his own identity," an identity bestowed upon him by someone else, he is—ironically—also in a position to assert his rights. Being a subject has advantages; it is not a powerless position.

Cloudmaking

When dealing with clouds and DNA, both of which are frequently the focus of scientific scrutiny and documentation, the problem of *writing*, or labeling, remains. There is a finality to the photograph and the printed word; they are testimony that an event took place. Once the event is recorded it passes into the annals of history. How does one represent something so fleeting, and still allow it to retain its mystery and ephemerality? Using tools that circumvent physicality, such as video, or digital prints, even sculpture that is first realized on a computer program, the virtual medium redoubles the effect of the dissolution of solidity. Prompted by the realization that genetics "can deliver certainty that other forms of representation couldn't before," Manglano-Ovalle's art undermines this certainty both through the immateriality of the digital media used to make the *Heavenly Bodies* prints, and through the thing that they evoke: the cloud.

Art historian Hubert Damisch writes in *A Theory of/Cloud/* that representation, as defined by Foucault, refers to "the relation between the signifier and that which is signified seems to be one of *standing for it*, of substitution, reciprocity, and a strictly binary organization in which the sign appears as a representation that duplicates and reduplicates itself." [13] Damisch points to the interchangeable significances of clouds in religious painting: "/cloud/ has no particular meaning in itself; its only meaning is that which stems from the relations of consecutiveness, opposition, and substitution that link it to other elements in the system." [14]

This sort of upheaval has a long tradition in the representation of clouds. Manglano-Ovalle's work is laced with art-historical references, and the *Heavenly Bodies*, his suite of prints, is no exception. He based *Cloud Prototype no. 1* (2003),[6] a titanium

and alloy sculpture of a thunderstorm cloud, on studies of an actual storm cloud created at the Department of Atmospheric Sciences, University of Illinois. The shaping of *Cloud Prototype no. 1* and the *Heavenly Bodies* reflects the influence of science on Romantic painting. Luke Howard's classification of clouds had a profound impact on the English painters who were his contemporaries. This aspect of the history of art is extremely important to the artist:

> If you look at clouds in paintings before Luke Howard, they have a kind of unrecognizable formlessness, but after him painters such as Constable and Turner started to be able to paint clouds the way they actually are. My contention is that, as always, forms do not exist without language, and once we are able to name things, we are able to give them forms. So, in a way, Howard allowed Constable and Turner to create their clouds, to give form to these ephemeral things. [15]

Constable believed in meteorology as an approach to art: "Painting is a science and should be pursued as an inquiry into the laws of nature," he claimed. [16] John Ruskin fiercely defended Turner's portrayals of cloud formations, preferring their modern aura of mystery to the solidity of clouds in Renaissance and Medieval paintings. Though clouds were being catalogued by science, a deeper understanding of their make-up contributed to their being less cartoonish, and more expressive, in painting. "There is no excellence without obscurity," Ruskin wrote, echoing Burke. [17] From a philosophical standpoint, clouds, despite the fact that language gave them form, still manage to create a sense of *slippage* in painting. Formless and weightless, clouds defy the confines of perspective. There are no boundaries in the sky. Damisch wrote:

> Perspective only needs to "know" things that it can reduce to its own order, things that occupy a place and the contour of which can be defined by lines. But the sky does not occupy a place, and cannot be measured; and as for clouds, nor can their outlines be fixed or their shapes analyzed in terms of surfaces. A cloud belongs to the class of "bodies without surfaces," as Leonardo da Vinci was to put it, bodies that have no precise form or extremities and whose limits interpenetrate with those of other clouds. [18]

"At the moment we see something beautiful, we undergo a radical decentering," Elaine Scarry writes in *On Beauty and Being Just.*[19] Presented as flatly as possible, the cloud/DNA of *Heavenly Bodies* bypasses perspective, a "structure of exclusion," and suggests instead that space is without limits. Perhaps clouds cannot be tied to a specific location or assume a particular meaning because they lack a center. [20] Our comprehension of their structure-less beauty decenters us in turn, permitting us to envision possibilities that, Scarry argues, lead to a general promotion of social justice. The cloud foils the irrefutability with which we have come to associate genetic data. *Heavenly Bodies* shows that clouds can't be contained or constrained, just as humans cannot, not even through language.



Fig. 6. *The Garden of Delights* (Installation view), 1998
48 color photographs laminated to Plexiglas
60 x 23 x 1¼ inches each
Southeastern Center for Contemporary Arts, Winston-Salem, NC

Hold Yourself in Mid-Air

The DNA used in *Heavenly Bodies* originated in an earlier work titled *The Garden of Delights* (1998),[Fig. 6] an installation that includes sixteen triptychs of the DNA prints in strong, vibrant colors. Looking at this work, we see that it is the source not only of the material being employed in *Heavenly Bodies*, but that this is where some of the crucial underlying themes of *Heavenly Bodies* begin to develop. *Garden of Delights* hinges on two art-historical references. The more obvious reference is evidenced in the title, borrowed from the central panel of Hieronymus Bosch's fantastic altarpiece depicting an idyllic setting where naked people, mutants and bizarre creatures romp in unabashed celebration of the grotesque and the sinful.

The lesser-known allusion is to the eighteenth-century *casta* paintings made in Mexico. These works portray the social caste system in Mexico through a taxonomic study of race mixing among the three major groups that resided in the Spanish colony: Indians, Spaniards, and Blacks. The images were meant as an admonition to Spanish settlers to keep their blood "pure." In an interview with curator Ivo Mesquita, Manglano-Ovalle discussed the European *casta* paintings, saying that they represent "the overwhelming desire of the Spanish colonizer to name and control the uncontrollable" and "a wish for order and a way of organizing races and relations within colonies." [21]

Casta paintings portrayed mother, father, and child in a domestic setting (and often with surprising tenderness). To lend the paintings an air of scientific authority, titles were

given to each of the families, such as "Spaniard and Albino Makes a Black-Return-Backwards" or "Spaniard and Indian Produce a Mestizo." [22] The only convincing category—or, more accurately, *non*-category—among the *casta* paintings is *tente en el aire.* [23] This particular classification, "Hold Yourself in Mid-Air," finds its ultimate expression in the *Heavenly Bodies* series. Not quite cloud, and not quite DNA, their indeterminacy defies all attempts at marginalization. Through the titles of the *casta* paintings, originally conceived as an instrument of oppression, Manglano-Ovalle found an opening through which he could blast the repressive system wide open, leaving only the sky as a limit.

When the *casta* painters adopted the inscription "Hold Yourself in Mid-Air," they were unwittingly signaling a viable possibility for a future in which race is no longer an issue, when all races have been intermingled to the point that it is not possible to hold one race as superior over all others. *Heavenly Bodies* subverts the symbolic power of DNA to advance the hope of suspending all racial boundaries. It is a stunning affirmation that the social construction of race—a concept as flimsy and ephemeral as a cloud—will one day disappear.

1 Numbers, 10:33, 10:34 NAE (New Analytical Edition).

2 Richard Hamblyn, *The Invention of Clouds* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2001) pp. 18-19.

3 Hubert Damisch, *A Theory of /Cloud/: Toward a History of Painting*, trans. Janet Lloyd (1972; rpt. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002) p. 36.

4 Valerie Palmer, "In Ordinary Time: Interview with Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle," *New Art Examiner* (January-February 2002): 34.

5 Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 59.

6 Ibid., 66.

7 Psalm 139:14 NAE; this phrase is also misquoted by Burke on page 63 of *A Philosophical Inquiry.*

8 Hamblyn, 11.

9 Ibid.

10 Ralph Christofori, "Beyond Limits and Frontiers," *Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle*, ed. Ralph Cristofori, Ivo Mesquita and James Rondeau. (Madrid: Fundacion "la Caixa," 2003), 41.

11 Conversation with author, November 29, 2003.

12 Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," in *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, Brian Wallis, ed. (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984), 420.

13 Damisch, 55.

14 Ibid., 45.

15 Ivo Mesquita, "A Conversation with Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle," *Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle*, (Madrid: Fundacion "la Caixa," 2003), 56.

16 Hamblyn, 222.

17 Damisch, 189.

18 Ibid.

19 Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 111.

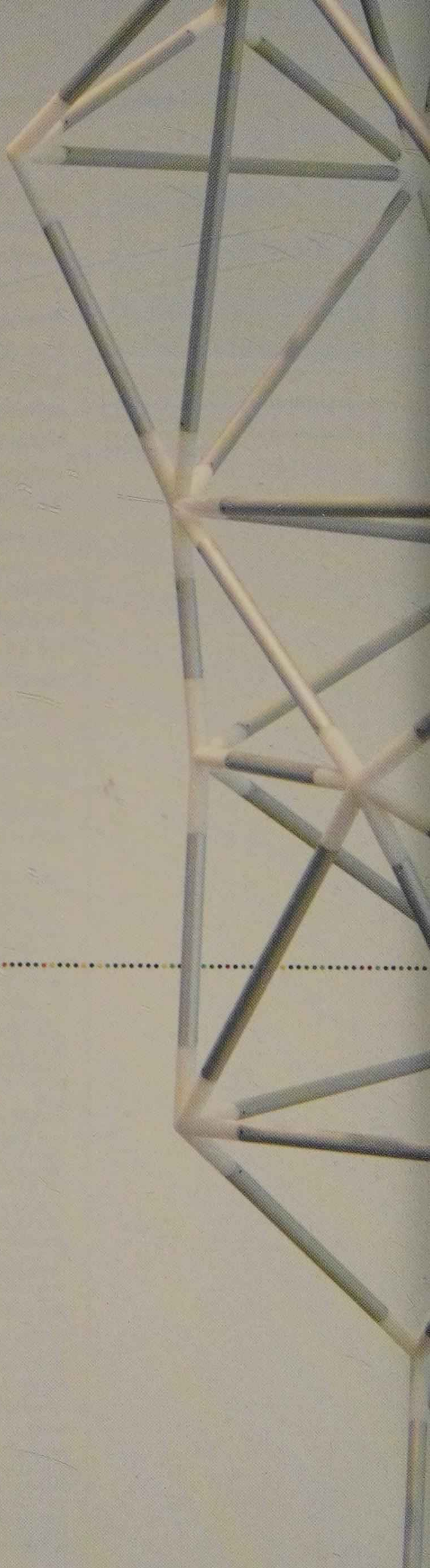
20 Clouds are comprised of tiny water droplets. The droplets materialize from excess water vapor that rises upward. A clear description of cloud development can be found at *The Weather World 2010 Project*, created by the Department of Atmospheric Sciences at University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

21 Mesquita, 45.

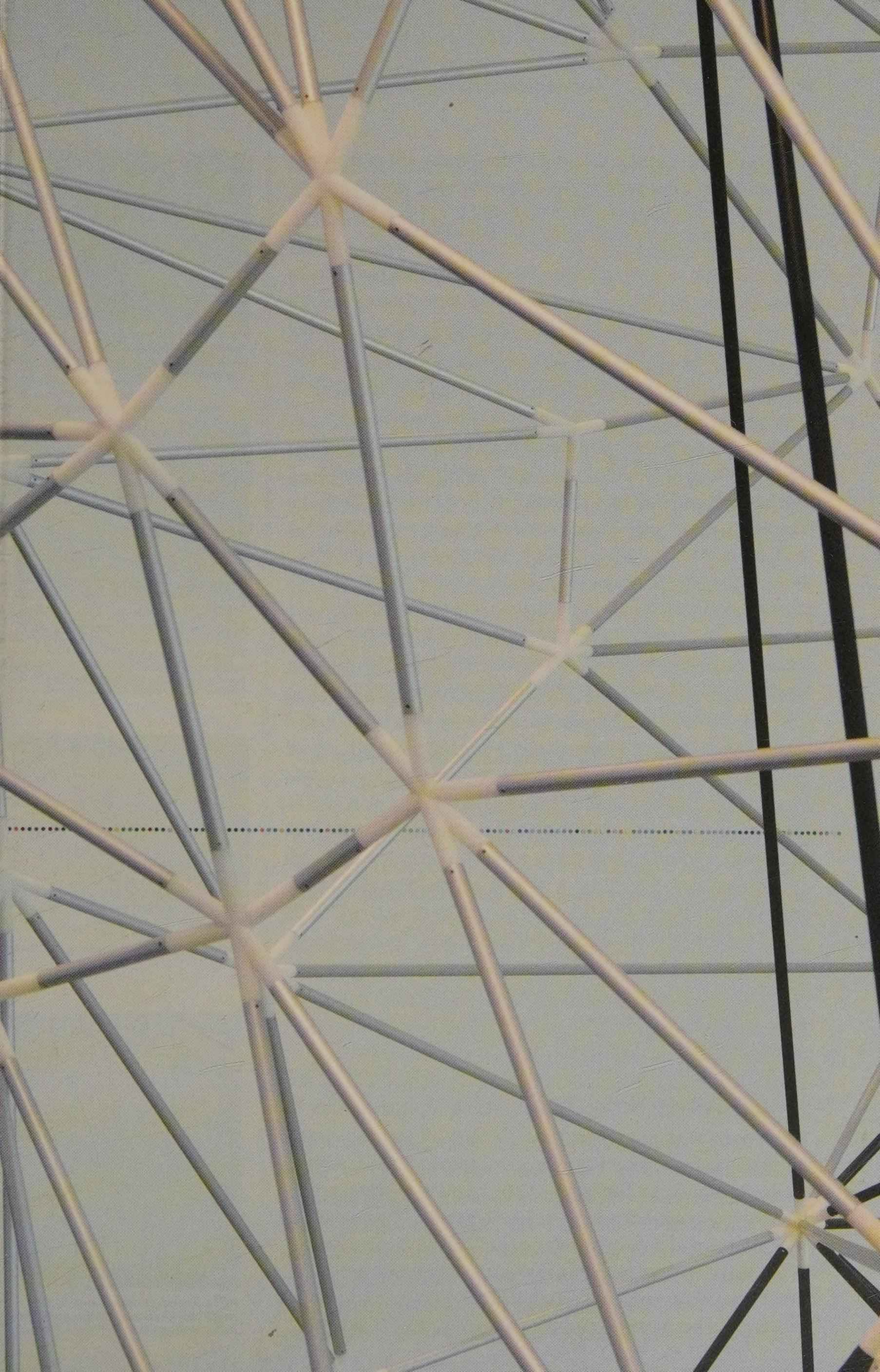
22 Maureen P. Sherlock, "Shadow Dancing: The Work of Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle," *Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle: The Garden of Delights* (Winston-Salem, N.C.: Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, 1998), 29–31; and Ilona Katzew, "Casta Painting: Identity and Social Stratification in Colonial Mexico," retrieved from http://www.ge.maricopa.edu/laberinto/fall1997/casta1997.htm on March 1, 2004.

23 A *tente en el aire* was the offspring of parents who were of mixed descent. Katzew quotes *Idea compendiosa del Reyno de Nueva Esparña* (1774) by Pedro Alonso O'Crouley, a native of Cadiz, on the lineages of New Spain: "Because it is agreed that from a Spaniard and a Negro a mulatto is born; from a mulatto and a Spaniard, a *morisco*; from a *morisco* and a Spaniard, a *torna atras* [return-backwards]; and from a *torna atras* and a Spaniard, a *tente en el aire* [hold-yourself-in-mid-air], which is the same as mulatto, it is said, and with reason, that a mulatto can never leave his condition of mixed blood, but rather it is the Spanish element that is lost and absorbed into the condition of a Negro...".

Everything for Everybody and All at the Same Time
Kris Douglas



Detail of ***Recumbent Iceberg (r11i01)***, 2005–2006



> Light is meaningful only in relation to darkness, and truth presupposes error. It is these mingled opposites which people our life, which make it pungent, intoxicating. We only exist in terms of this conflict, in the zone where black and white clash.
>
> Louis Aragon [1]

Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle is immersed in an ongoing, critical investigation of diverse conditions, systems, and histories that define and describe our existence. Often collaborating with specialists across disciplines—including engineering, architecture, genomics, and climatology—the artist produces objects that are theoretically engaging, technically complex, and formally captivating. Characterized by a sophisticated interaction of exhaustive research and precise execution, his artistic practice addresses diverse subjects such as identity, ethics, observation, aesthetics, climate and the global impact of social and political systems on our cultural framework. Driven by his interest in these vast, universal conditions, Manglano-Ovalle continually seeks out new methods of understanding to create works that critique and comment on these complex issues.

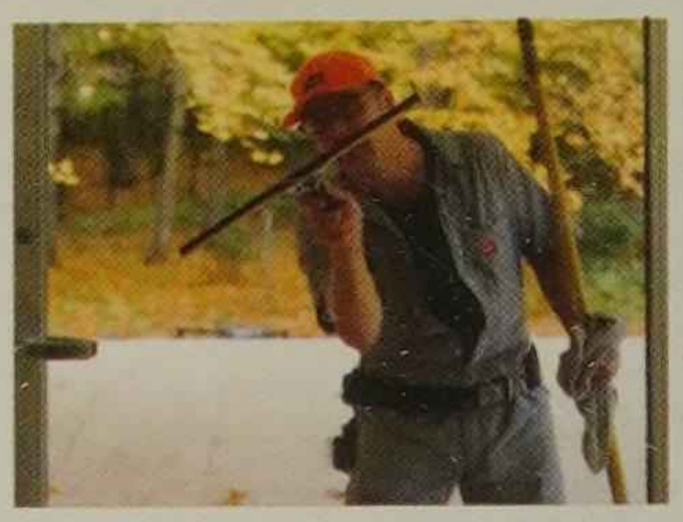


Fig. 1. Still from *Le Baiser/The Kiss*, 2000
Suspended aluminum framework, multi-channel video projection with sound
Dimensions variable



Fig. 2. *Climate*, 2000
Suspended aluminum framework, multi-channel video projection with sound
Dimensions variable
Installation view at Max Protetch Gallery, New York. Photo by Dennis Cowley

Manglano-Ovalle frequently utilizes recognized movements, phenomena, and iconic figures as vehicles to arrive at works with numerous metaphoric possibilities. For example, in the video installations *Le Baiser/The Kiss* (2000),[Fig. 1] *Climate* (2000)[Fig. 2] and *Alltagszeit (In Ordinary Time)* (2001),[Fig. 3] the architecture of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe represents not only the ambitions and failings of modernist ideology, but also the sociopolitical issues of hierarchy, transparency, and universalism. In the site-specific work *Search* (2001),[Fig. 4] Manglano-Ovalle employs sophisticated monitoring equipment designed to receive extraterrestrial signals to explore broader themes of observation and immigration at the border between the United States and Mexico. In his DNA portrait series *Garden of Delights* (1998),[Fig. 5] he utilizes genomic representations as a means of addressing societal demand for technological advancement and issues of race, categorization, and identity. However, Manglano-Ovalle is not interested in creating associations among disciplines, but in illuminating their existing interactions and synergies. He explains, "When I use science, when I use DNA, meteorology, ballistics, or forensics, I'm not interested in fashioning a relationship between art and science. I'm acknowledging that it already exists. That is the



Fig. 3. Still from *Alltagszeit (In Ordinary Time)*, 2000
Single-channel video projection with sound

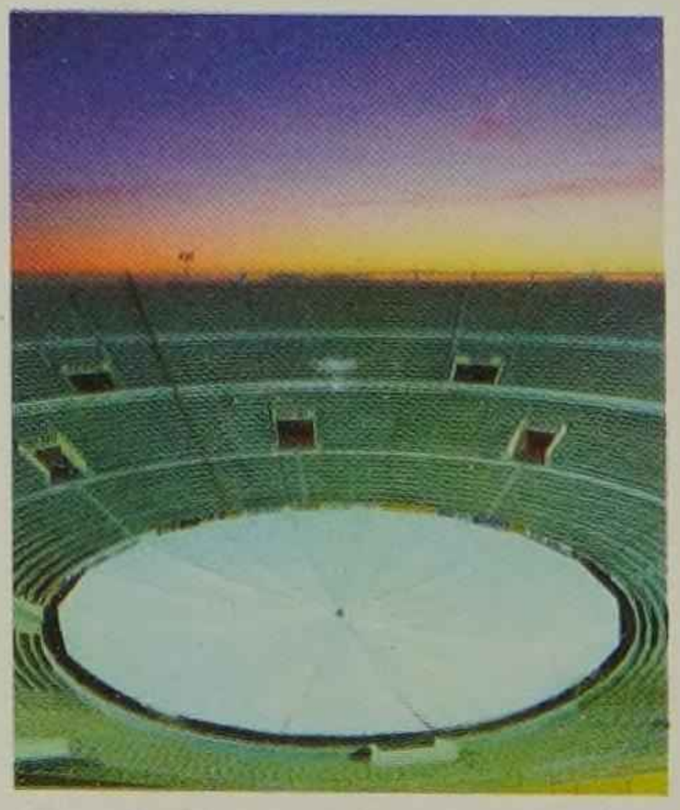


Fig. 4. *Search (En Busquedad)*, 2001
Radio telescope installation at the Plaza de Toros Monumental, Tijuana, Mexico.

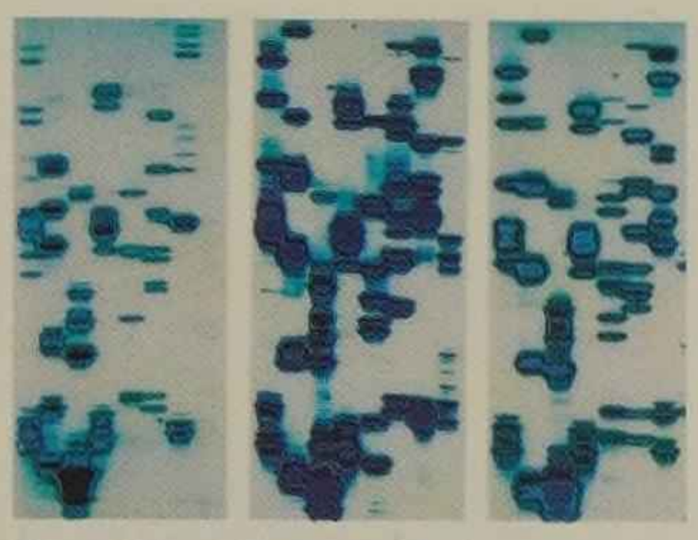


Fig. 5. Glenn, Dario, and Tyrone (from *The Garden of Delights*), 1998. Three C-prints mounted on Plexiglas 60 x 23 x 1¼ inches each, 60 1/16 x 75 x 1¼ inches Commissioned by the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, Winston-Salem, NC



Fig. 6. *Bloom*, 1995 Gelatin, glycerin, bullets, steel, video Dimensions variable Installation view at The Cultural Center, Chicago.

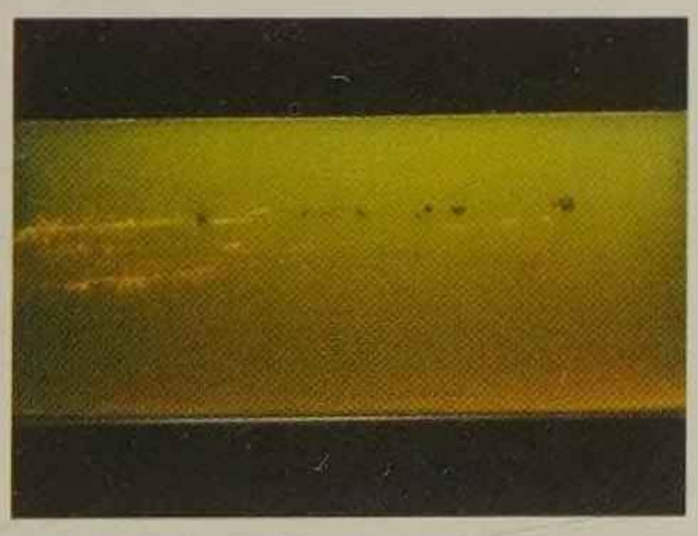


Fig. 7. *Bloom* (detail), 1995

reason that I started to do DNA projects—not because of the availability of new tools of science, but because all of a sudden it had become part of a larger cultural vocabulary." [2] Consequently, the research and methodologies used in his work do not merely represent a fascination with specific individuals, scientific disciplines, or their related technologies, but become a point of departure. Rather than asserting a singular viewpoint, his work offers an opportunity to consider potential dualities and dichotomies inherent in these issues.

This exploration of dichotomies has long been present in Manglano-Ovalle's work. The artist is particularly interested in the place where mutually exclusive constructs seem to coexist. For instance, he has described his intention for the sculpture series *Bloom* (1995–96) Fig. 6+7 to be at once beautiful and horrific. This series consists of brightly colored blocks of ballistic gelatin into which hollow-point bullets have been fired. This gelatin is specifically formulated to mimic the qualities of human tissue and to measure the impact of a bullet on flesh. Subsequently encased in Plexiglas and resting on long steel tables, the individual blocks and installation as a whole exhibit a cool, minimalist aesthetic and reference works such as those of Donald Judd and Carl Andre. In describing this work, Manglano-Ovalle stated, "It's a kind of seduction and repulsion at the same time. It's at that point where...good and evil begin to meet in ethics and aesthetics. Art has long been fascinated with this sort of sublime area where beauty and the monstrous meet." [3] Describing this work as a meditation on violence, he further explained that people "have to deliberate with the issues on a personal level. 'How could I be attracted to such a violent thing?' they might ask." Other presumably antithetical constructs represented in Manglano-Ovalle's work frequently emerge—failure and redemption, power and vulnerability, and scientific promise and threat. In the exhibition *Blinking Out of Existence*, weather becomes the primary metaphor used to facilitate the consideration of these coexisting constructs.

The initial structure of the exhibition may appear to the viewer to focus on a relatively straightforward presentation of meteorological conditions—sculptural representations of icebergs and clouds, the sounds of wind and an apparent thunderstorm, and a photographic diptych of clouds. Though the technical sophistication, data-driven origins and formal elegance of these pieces may be readily apparent to the viewer, the exhibition invites consideration of issues beyond

the scientifically inspired or aestheticized representations of nature. Here, weather becomes the vehicle for addressing a broader understanding of "climates"—political, social, cultural, economic, geographic, racial, and technological—and the inherent dualities therein.

The large-scale sculpture *Recumbent Iceberg (r11i01)* is based on scientific data of a once-existing iceberg drifting in the Labrador Sea, which was scanned with the assistance of the Canadian Hydraulic Center utilizing advanced radar and sonar. Using data provided by the Center, the artist worked closely with Chicago architect Colin Franzen to create a 25-foot sculpture comprised of thousands of aluminum tubes and rapid-prototyped joints fabricated of nylon and plastic. In the creation and production of this work, Manglano-Ovalle avoids beginning with a mere representation of an object. Instead, he works to capture characteristics of an existing form, with the collaboration of specialists and the use of advanced data collection methods providing the means to this end. As acknowledgement of the process by which this work was created, all of the data necessary to construct the sculpture is contained on a USB drive, which is attached to one of the sculpture's joints. In selecting the form of an iceberg, Manglano-Ovalle explores the allegorical and symbolic aspects of this natural phenomenon—the unknown below the surface, the irrepressible and evolving force of nature, a structure nonobservant of political borders or boundaries, freedom of movement, and the proverbial "tip of the iceberg".

Although typically mounted from the ceiling and positioned vertically, for this exhibition the sculpture is installed on its side, hence the use of "recumbent" in its revised title. Considering the utopian principles and figures of interest to Manglano-Ovalle—in this instance R. Buckminster Fuller—this reconfigured presentation allows for further critique of high modernism, inviting consideration of its possible failings or the desire to "topple" or push against these ideals. In describing his own relationship with the creation of the sculpture, Manglano-Ovalle explains "I often thought that this iceberg is basically a Bucky Fuller dome that I have taken and then in my disgust with the fact that his utopian model didn't fulfill itself, I grabbed it, crunched it, and threw it in the waste can...but then said 'Oh I can't do that, let me get it back' and pulled it out. The problem is I can no longer construct it, because it is this broken object. But that's what an iceberg

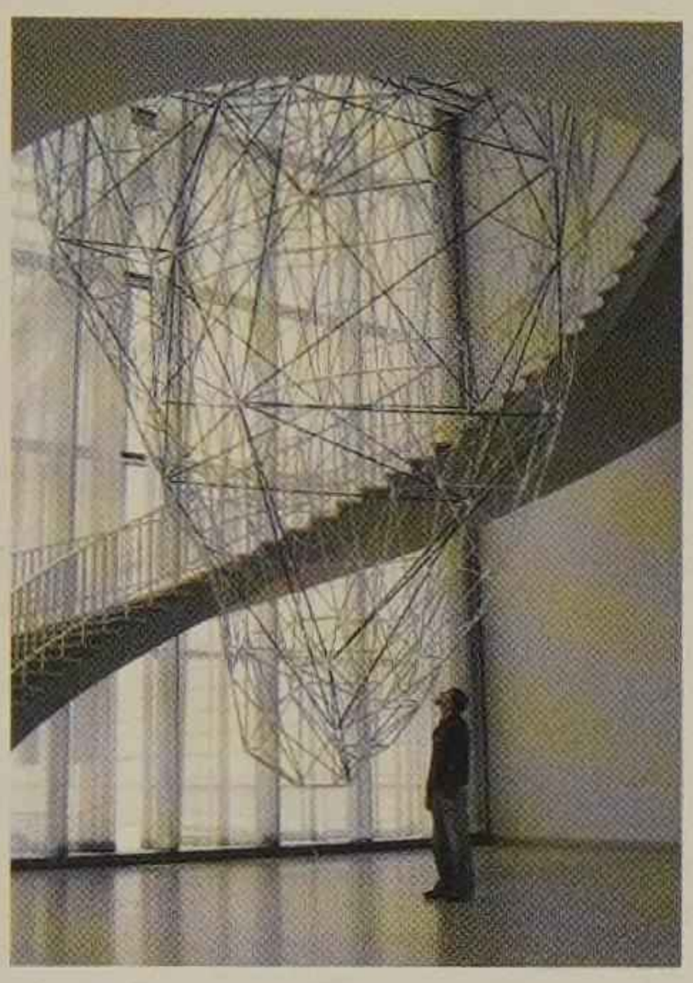


Fig. 8. ***Iceberg (r11i01)*, 2005**
Suspended anodized aluminum tubes, rapid prototyped ABS plastic and nylon, approximately 25 x 20 x 18 feet
Installation view at The Art Institute of Chicago.

is, really, just an object breaking off a glacial sheet." [2] Further, this work challenges modernist ideals and construction methods by emphasizing nonhierarchical form in which each component is unique, with none having more importance than the other in the final construction.

When originally installed at The Art Institute of Chicago, the sculpture [Fig. 8] was suspended from the ceiling, allowing it to float above the gallery floor. This dramatic vertical orientation and framework construction began to reference the form of a skyscraper, arguably paying homage to Fuller and perhaps acknowledging Chicago's important architectural history. In this way the work builds connections to Manglano-Ovalle's previous projects that confront modernist ideology and iconic proponents such as Mies van der Rohe. In its second presentation at the Rochester Art Center, the predominantly horizontal orientation and altered title invite a more critical examination of Fuller and the associated failings of modernism. In its recumbent position, the sculpture may in fact take on more of an appearance of a collapsed geodesic dome or another form that was of great interest to Fuller, the airship or blimp. In his book *Buckminster Fuller*, Martin Pawley writes, "Fuller became obsessed with the capability of airships…he saw their light but enormously strong tensile tubular construction as 'no more than a new kind of skyscraper laid upon its side'." [4] Such structures are also of interest to Manglano-Ovalle, whose photographic work *Zeppelin Hanger* (2003) continues to explore these constructions and their metaphoric possibilities as related to climate. A further consequence of the altered orientation of the sculpture is a more direct reference to the actual iceberg's physical movement and constant transformation and deterioration, until its ultimate disappearance.

Mapped and produced using similar methods as *Recumbent Iceberg (r11io1)* but with fewer points of data and in smaller scale, *Black Berg (r39oi02)* encloses a meteorological weather balloon referencing the scientific processes used to understand natural phenomena such as icebergs, clouds and weather systems. The near-perfect sphere of the balloon introduces an additional formal component while also hinting at a primary method of construction and design—the use of triangulation to achieve rigidity and strength, a technique inspired by Fuller's geodesic dome.

Freedom of movement across geographical and political borders, migration and immigration, and ephemerality and transformation are issues pertinent to the work *Cloud Prototype no. 1*, a large-scale sculpture fabricated from fiberglass and clad in titanium-alloy foil. Based on actual data scanned during a storm by the Department of Atmospheric Sciences at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, the sculpture formally represents a fleeting, critical moment in the life of a cumulonimbus thundercloud. Working with architect Douglas Garofalo, Manglano-Ovalle utilized this data to develop the structure and final form of the sculpture, which was then produced by advanced, computer-controlled milling machines used by the automobile industry. Although created with the assistance of advanced technologies, Manglano-Ovalle opted to utilize a traditional hand-application technique for the titanium foil sheets that make up the outer layer of the work. In doing so, the overall patchwork pattern achieved by this method becomes reminiscent of a data grid and begins to challenge the exceptionally technical and automated processes of the sculpture's beginnings.

This is also one of several works, including *Time* and *Plume*, developed by Manglano-Ovalle following concentrated research of theoretical physicist and director of the Manhattan Project, J. Robert Oppenheimer. Like *Cloud Prototype no. 1*, Oppenheimer can be understood as a metaphor for transformation, in particular the moment when a shift occurs from the benign to the perilous. Focused at one point on cosmological research, Oppenheimer's recruitment to the Manhattan Project and "success" in advancing atomic science led to a critical transformative point in which scientific achievement turns to a destructive and perhaps unstoppable force. Manglano-Ovalle's work invites consideration of the place where good and evil meet, and may suggest that the co-existence of these ever-competing constructs is an inherent part of the human condition. William Blake wrote, "Without contraries is no progression. Attraction and repulsion, reason and energy, love and hate, are necessary to human existence."[5] Taken from Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven of Hell*, this assertion originates from the author's description of a visit to Hell—a device adopted by Blake from Dante's *Inferno* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Manglano-Ovalle sees Oppenheimer as our Virgil, describing him as both "the destroyer and the conscience."

Time is installed in this exhibition as a dramatic large-scale mural 24 feet wide and 15 feet tall. The Sanskrit text appearing in the work is taken from the *Bhagavad-Gita*, a sacred Hindu writing that addresses in part the moral obligation of a skilled warrior to participate in the making of war. Translated, the text can read "I am become Time, destroyer of worlds." Oppenheimer, later recalling the scene at Los Alamos in 1944 at the testing of the first atomic bomb stated, "A few people laughed, a few people cried, most people were silent. There floated through my mind a line from the *Bhagavad-Gita* in which Krishna is trying to persuade the Prince that he should do his duty: 'I am become death: the destroyer of worlds'." [6] Manglano-Ovalle has described the colors selected for this work as inspired by this text—apocalyptic colors reminiscent of great destruction.

Red Fist, a new work created for this exhibition, presents a stark contrast to the large technologically and structurally sophisticated sculptures that surround it by quite literally representing the "hand of the artist" in its simplest form—a ball of epoxy squeezed within the artist's fist. Placing this object directly on the floor and removing it from any formal or traditional method of display also imbues the object with an additional sense of insignificance and vulnerability. However, this work is formally quite similar to both *Cloud Prototype no. 1* and *Recumbent Iceberg (r11i01)*, thereby challenging the immensity and technicality of those works with its directness and economy of scale. In further contrast to its physical dimensions and placement, the prototype works leading to *Red Fist* were titled *Hand Grenades in Black and Blue*, alluding to potential destruction by one's own hand.

Inspired by Daniel Buren's abstract minimalist in situ works from the late 1960's, *Random Sky* is a digital program generating random environmental calculations in real-time. Its performance maintains a degree of unpredictability informed by data gathered from weather instruments located within the interior of the gallery. Whereas typically this work utilizes data recorded via weather instruments located exterior to the exhibition space, for *Blinking Out of Existence*, interior data collection is used to allow for new considerations of "climate"—the interaction of the viewers with the works, the social climate of the space itself, and ideas of creating climate by simply providing a language of data. Projected as oscillating vertical blue and white bands across the gallery's south wall, *Random*

Sky results in tendencies and possibilities rather than predetermined narratives. As with other works in the exhibition, *Random Sky* emphasizes the importance of data interpretation and presentation. However, this transitory information is immediately registered and represented, only to disappear as a new band of color replaces the old. This is in opposition to other works such as *Plume*, *Cloud Prototype no. 1*, and *Recumbent Iceberg (r11i01)* that also capture ephemeral events, but confine them to a specific moment in time.

The photographic diptych *Plume* consists of representations of a massive thundercloud—one a positive or "standard" photographic image, the other its tonally reversed negative, obtained from the archives of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Having the distinct appearance of atomic mushroom clouds, this work emphasizes Manglano-Ovalle's interest in the metaphoric possibilities of weather and climate; the images can at once be interpreted as straightforward documents of a cloud and as symbols of looming destruction or change. Only the knowledge of their true nature, gained via the works' written description, reveals their origins as natural cumulonimbus formations.

The twin-speaker installation *41° N, 74° W* projects the sound of wind noise through transparent parabolic speakers, one set at a slight angle to the other above the listener. The original audio recording was made on April 28, 2000 at 41° North latitude and 74° West longitude, at an elevation of 1350 feet in lower Manhattan—the site of the World Trade Center. Following the destruction occurring on September 11, 2001, the ambient sounds captured at precisely this location gained new significance. For this exhibition, *41° N, 74° W* was purposely placed in close proximity to the gallery in which *Plume* was installed. Between these two works, Manglano-Ovalle tinted an array of windows present in the gallery space a deep red, creating a synergistic effect among these three elements. As a result, the soft wind noise, permeating red light, and ominous clouds on the horizon interact and seemingly portend danger.

As a sculptor, Manglano-Ovalle has a strong interest in sound due to its ability to move into and occupy space. In *Sonambulo II (blue)*, a gunshot recorded in the artist's neighborhood in Chicago has been extensively altered, suggesting the sound of a rainstorm. The serene environment created by both

the ambient blue light and the audio recording is in direct opposition to the original source, a sound alluding to violence. In describing this work, Manglano-Ovalle explains, "You think you're hearing a storm and thunder, but what you're actually hearing are morphed versions of one gunshot replicated over 168,000 times. So what you're really hearing is a torrential rain of bullets, while you think you're hearing a New Age tape...You get to the point where you are meditating and lulling on this thing. It's only by finding out that you are actually listening to bullets that you are forced to contemplate the nature of your own seduction in this meditation on violence." [3]

For *Sonambulo III (Infrared)*, a night-vision camera was used to record the artist's son sleeping in his crib. Infrared technology, like many specialized technologies, is now readily recognizable by the lay public and imbued with cultural meaning. We have frequently seen footage filmed with this equipment in recent military conflicts, and as a consequence, have come to associate the hazy green appearance afforded by this technology with clandestine observation. This piece is surrounded by larger-scale work that references potentially menacing forces of nature and civilization; yet, the familiar and profound image of a child sleeping presents a possibly more idealistic counterpoint—humanity's hope for the future despite looming threats.

Portrait of a Young Reader is a scientifically accurate yet abstract DNA portrait, rendered as a continuous line of multicolored disks spanning 160 feet on three wall surfaces. A specialized DNA testing method was used to create a unique genetic fingerprint. By transferring the genetic data to a digital rendering platform, Manglano-Ovalle in essence created an expansive "portrait" of the individual. By selecting an anonymous person who lived near the Bronx branch of the New York Public Library to volunteer the submission of a tissue sample used in this piece, Manglano-Ovalle created a work that becomes a portrait of all young readers, and in effect, a portrait standing for humankind itself. While genomic research has limitless potential for positively impacting humanity, this same advancing technology brings with it an increased emphasis on identification and classification, having significant social implications. Manglano-Ovalle explains, "Race is a total abstract categorization and an arbitrary categorization, but in the moment of naming you give shape, designation, criteria and hierarchy to something." [2]

As a keen observer of evolving climates and conditions, Manglano-Ovalle monitors and evaluates the potential impact these systems have on our society. Using his capacity to identify influential shifts and the tensions between seemingly dichotomous aspects therein, his work creates the opportunity to explore these concerns in greater depth and from multiple perspectives. The formal beauty, pristine minimalist aesthetic, and technical qualities of his work provide an accessible entry point to initially engage the viewer. Manglano-Ovalle then challenges this known quality by revealing additional critical information, thereby creating situations where competing constructs can exist simultaneously. This in turn facilitates a broader understanding of individual works, the interaction of these works within the exhibition as a whole, and their associated metaphoric possibilities—"everything for everybody and all at the same time." [7]

1 Louis Aragon, "Preface to a Modern Mythology" in the *Paris Peasant* (1926), English translation by Simon Watson Taylor (Exact Change Publishing; Reprint Edition, 1995).

2 Author in conversation with the artist, May 27, 2006.

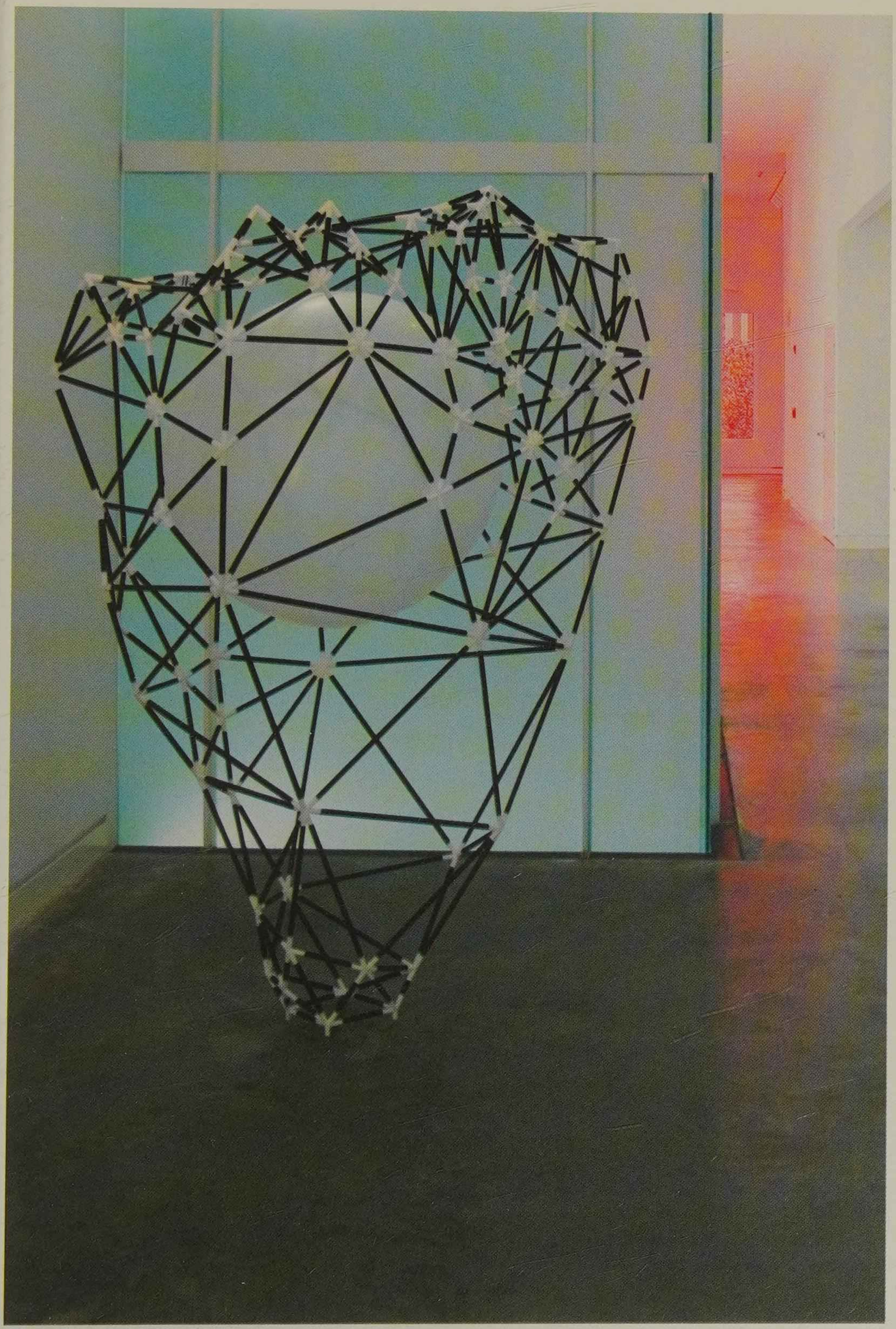
3 Owen McNally, "Beauty, Monstrosity of Violence Clash in New Exhibition at RAW." *Hartford Courant* (July 21, 1996).

4 Martin Pawley, *Buckminster Fuller*. Taplinger Publishing Company: New York (1990, p. 43).

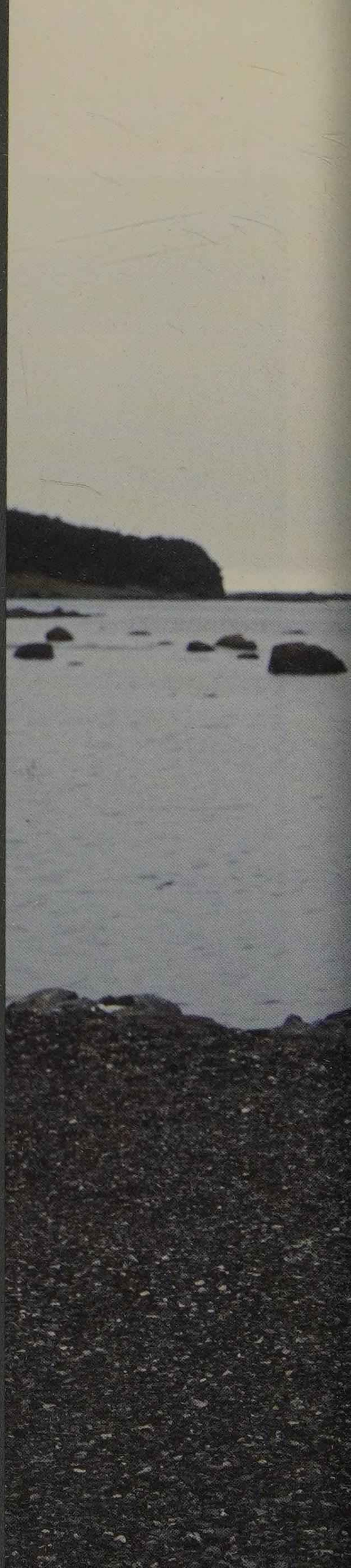
5 William Blake, "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell", plate 3, "The Argument," (c. 1793), reprinted in *Blake Complete Writings with Variant Readings*, Geoffrey Keynes, ed. (Oxford University Press, 1971)

6 People and Events: J. Robert Oppenheimer (1904–1967). *The American Experience: Race for the Superbomb* (1999). WGBH Educational Foundation.

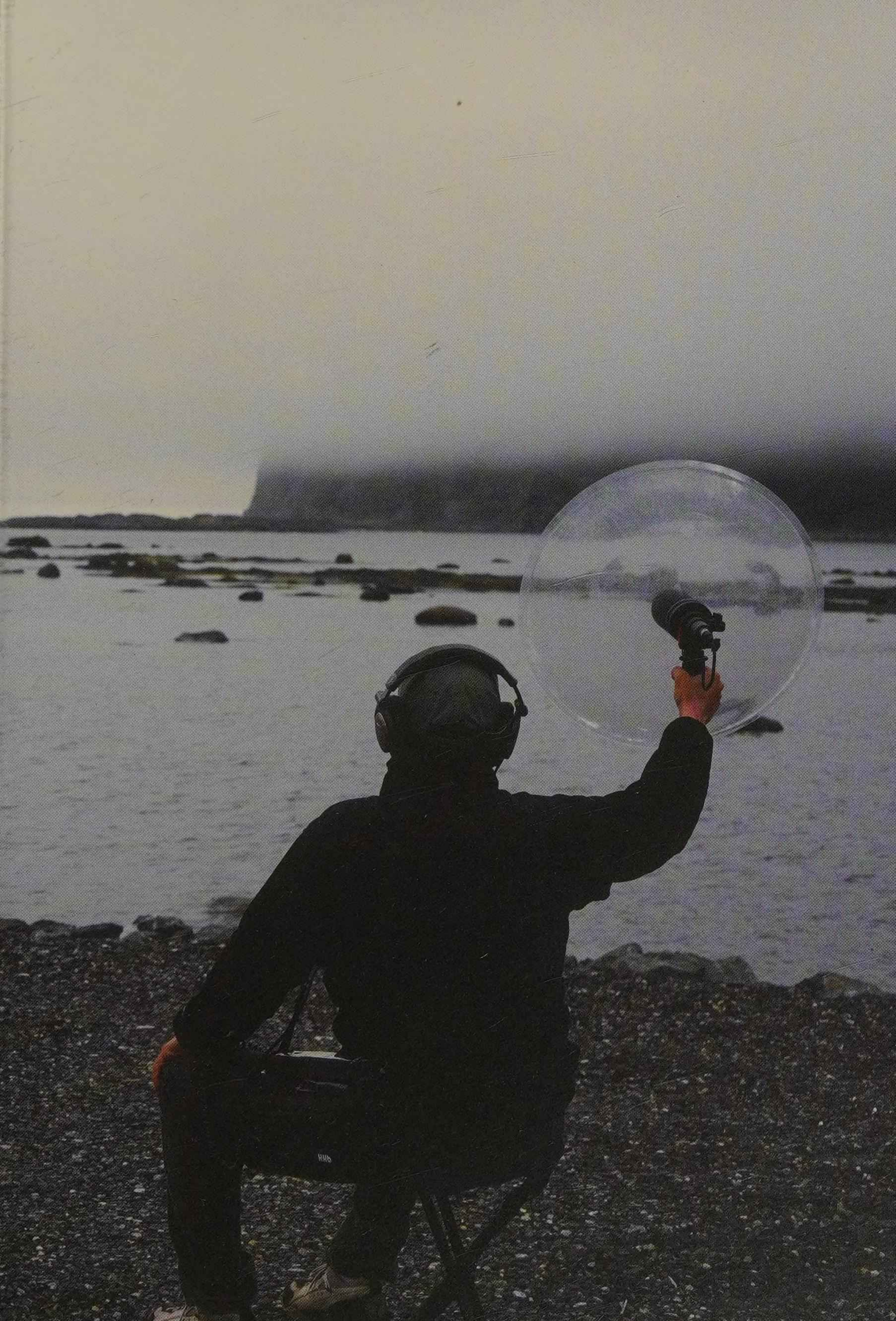
7 Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle, from the unpublished notes on *Climate* (2000). This is the English translation of a spoken mantra incorporated in the work, from the original Korean.



Black Berg (r390i02), 2006



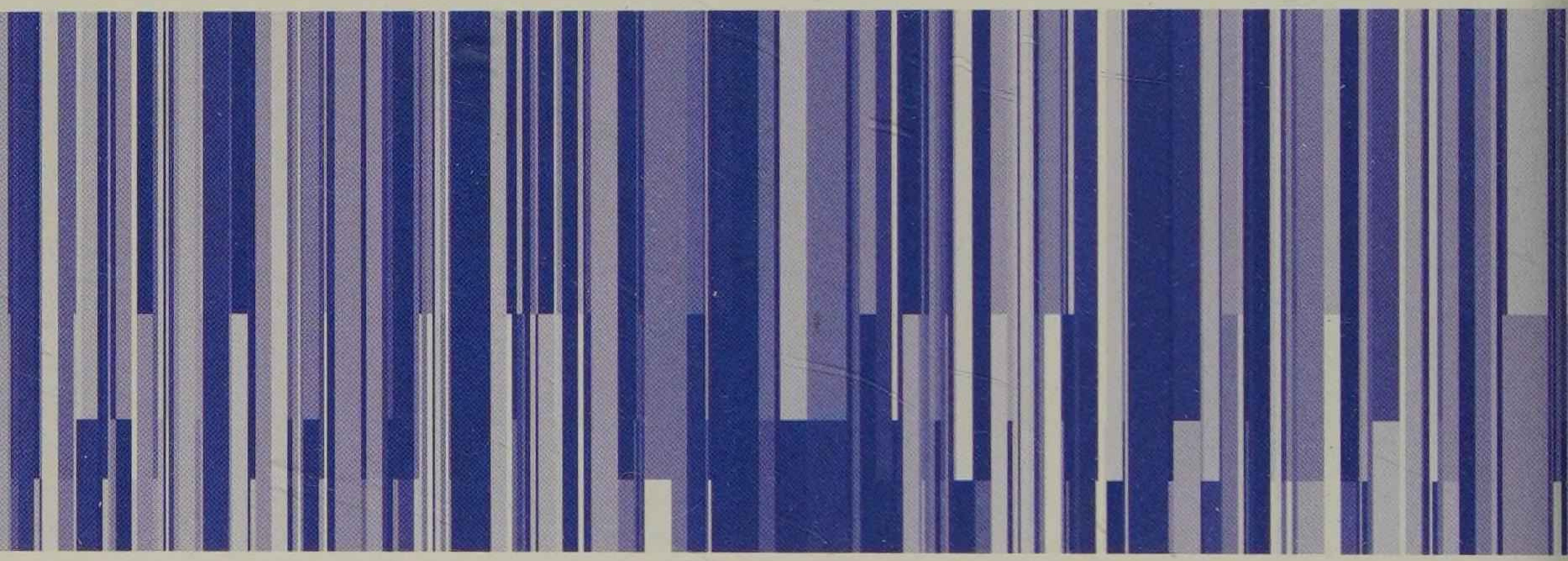
The artist in St. Anthony, Newfoundland, recording sound with a parabolic disc with stereomicrophone.





Cloud Prototype no. 1, 2003

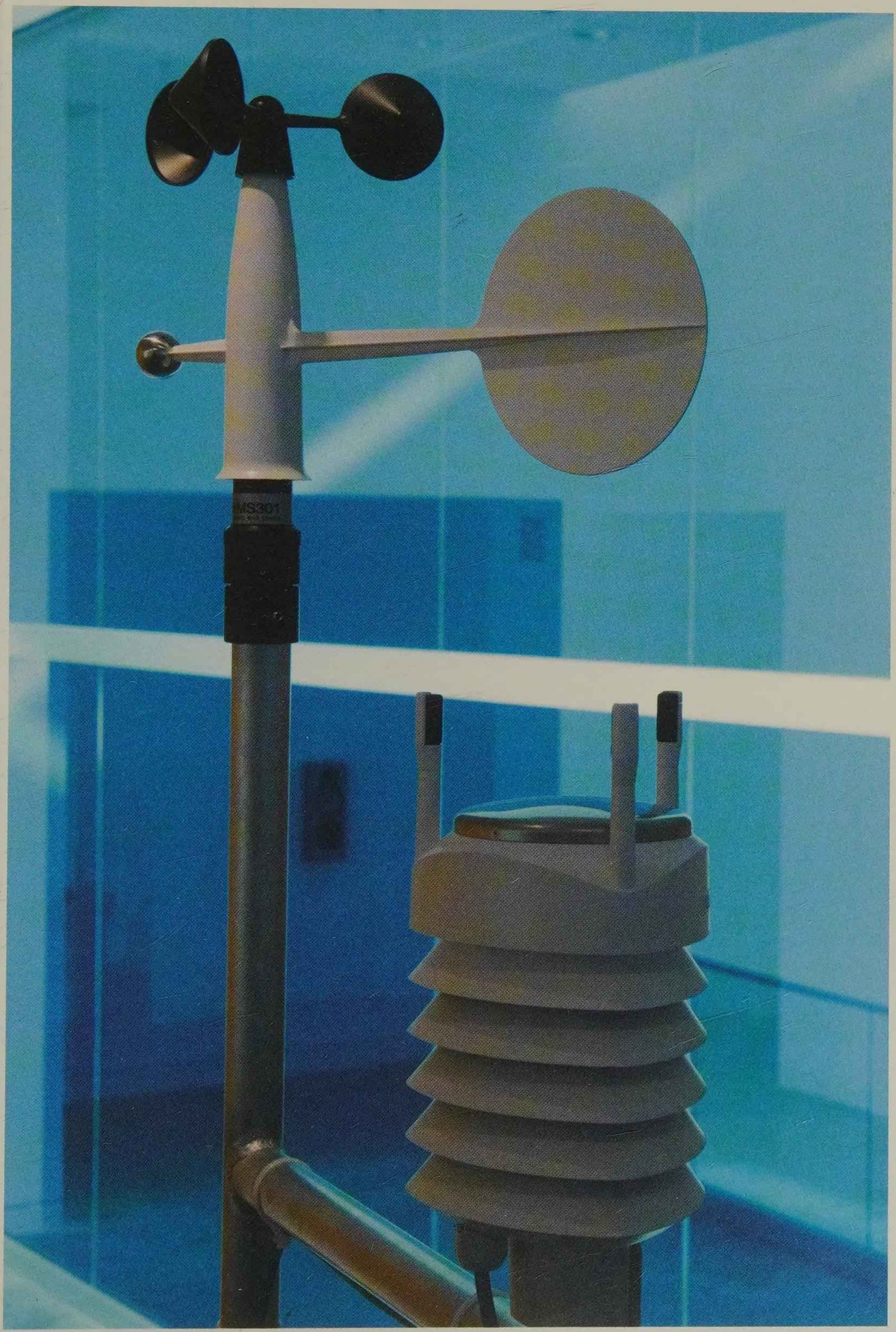




Rochester Art Center
Burton and Judy Onofrio Gallery
July 16, 2006, 3:35 PM
71˚ Farenheit, 52% relative humidity
Wind WNW at .2mph
6 individuals present within the gallery

Random Sky, 2006

Weather transmitter from ***Random Sky,*** 2006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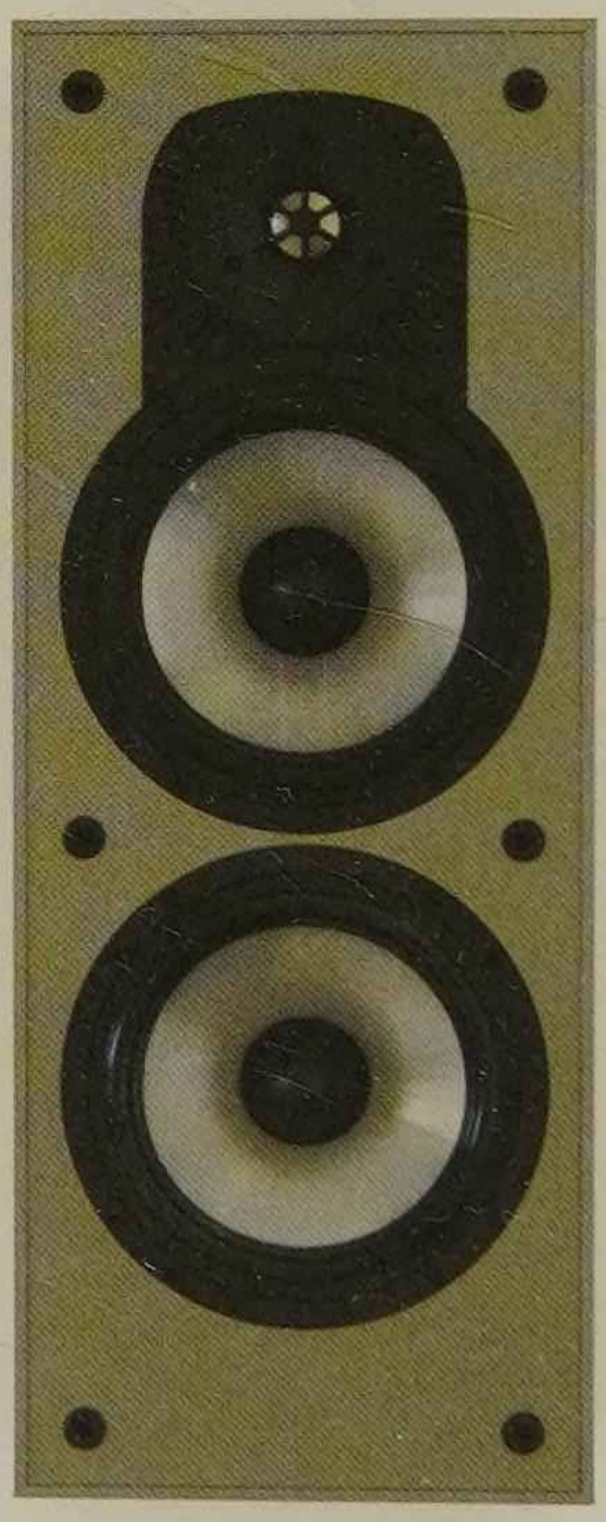
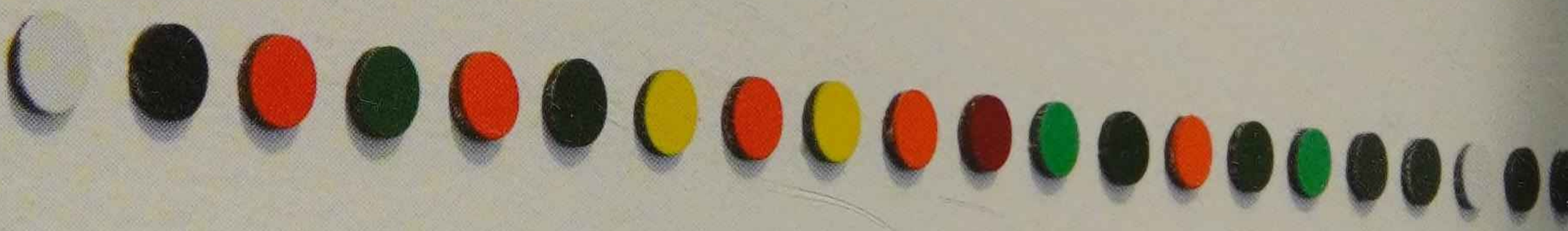
Installation view of ***Sonambulo II (blue)***, 1999

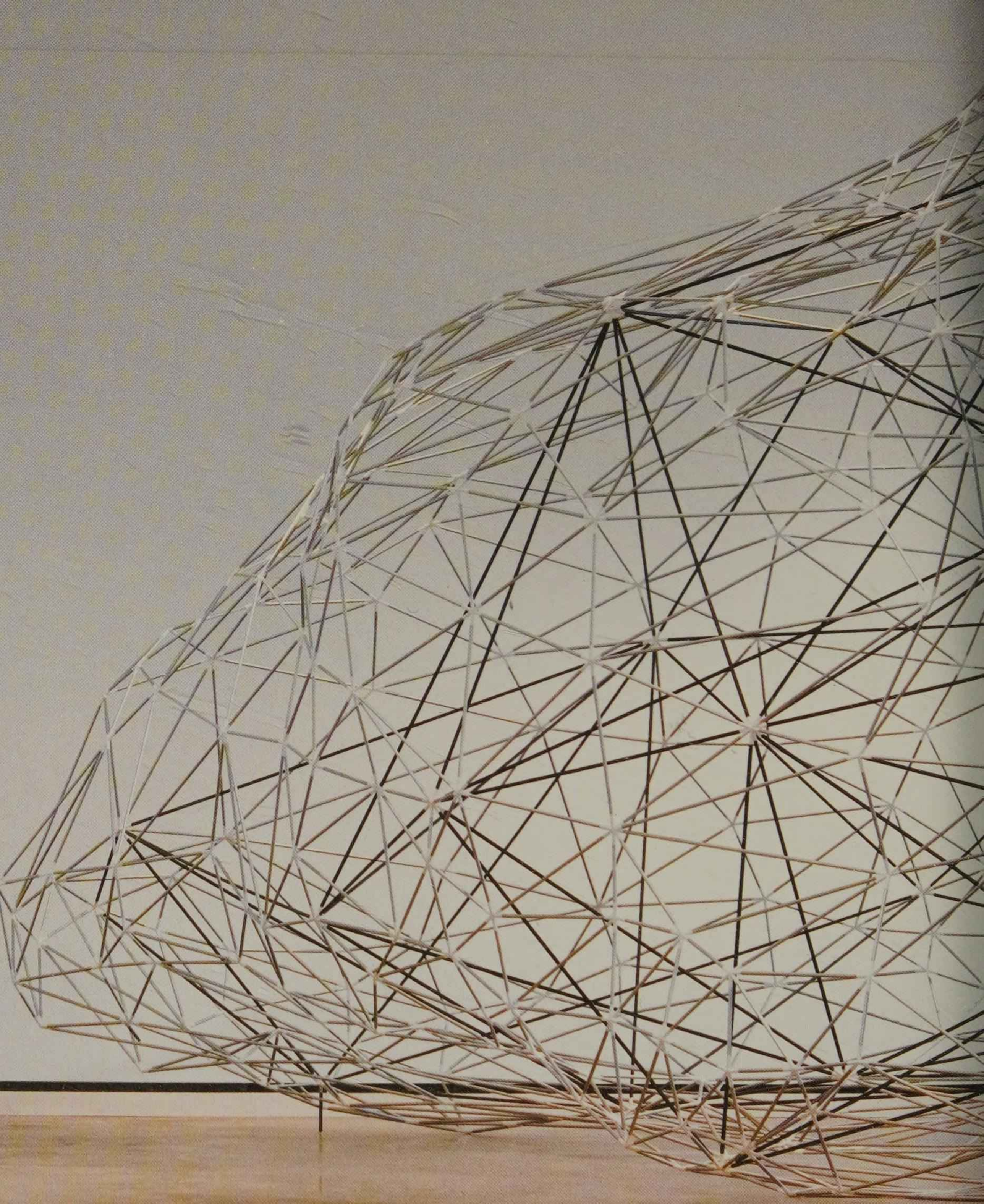


Sonambulo II (blue), 1999



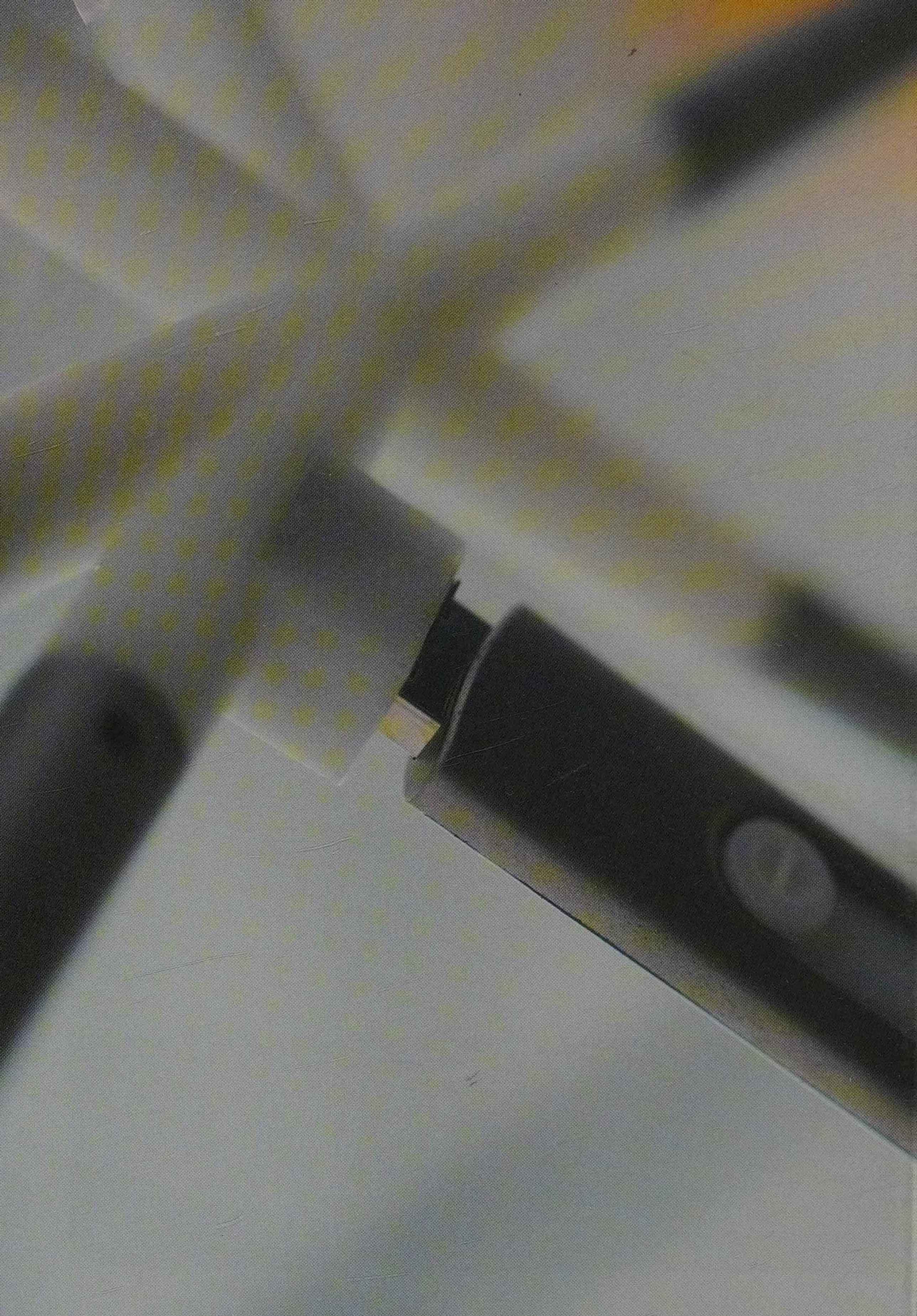


Portrait of a Young Reader, 2006



Recumbent Iceberg (r11i01), 2005–2006

Detail of ***Recumbent Iceberg (r11i01)***, 2005–2006



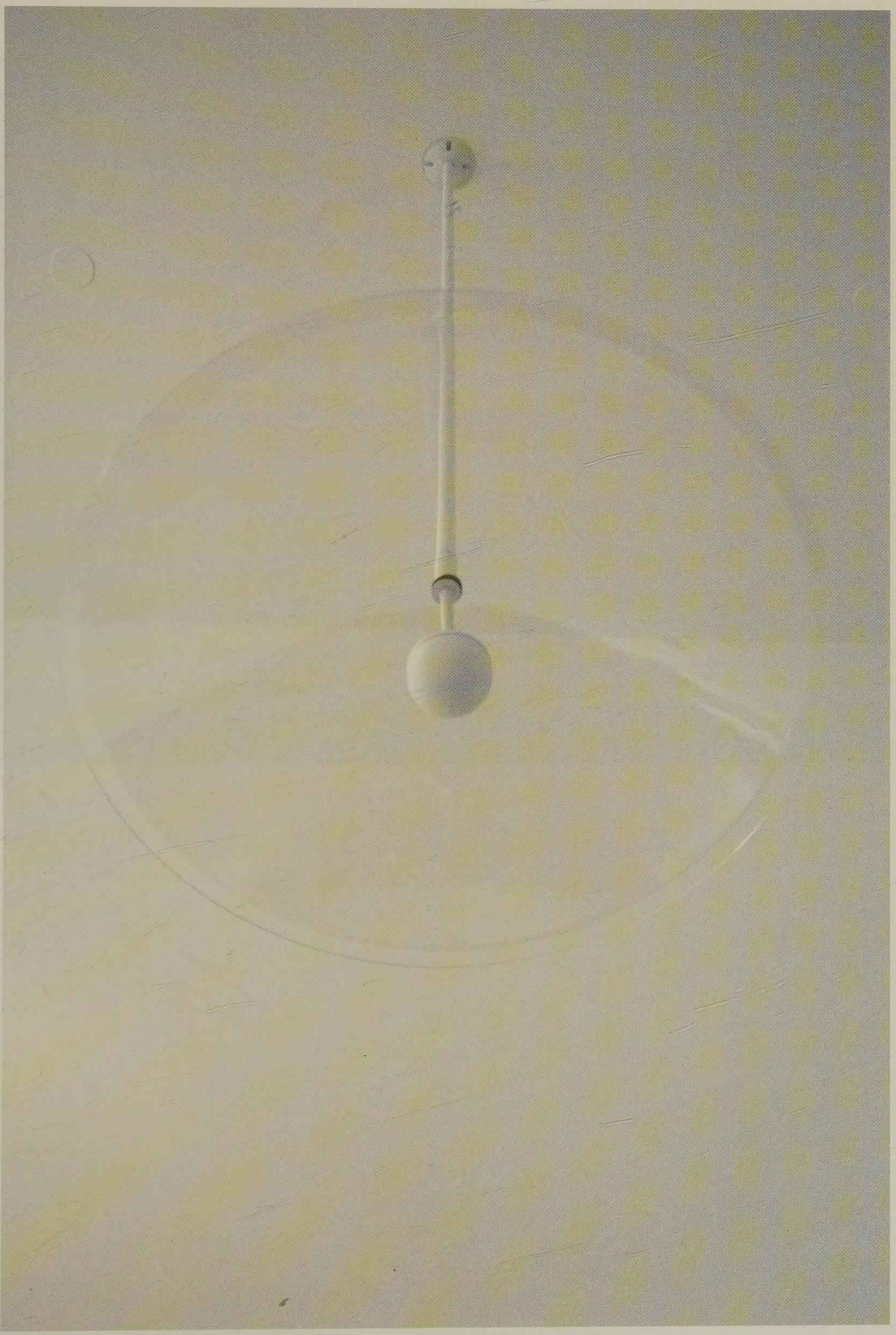
Red Fist, 2006



Sonambulo III (Infrared), 2003



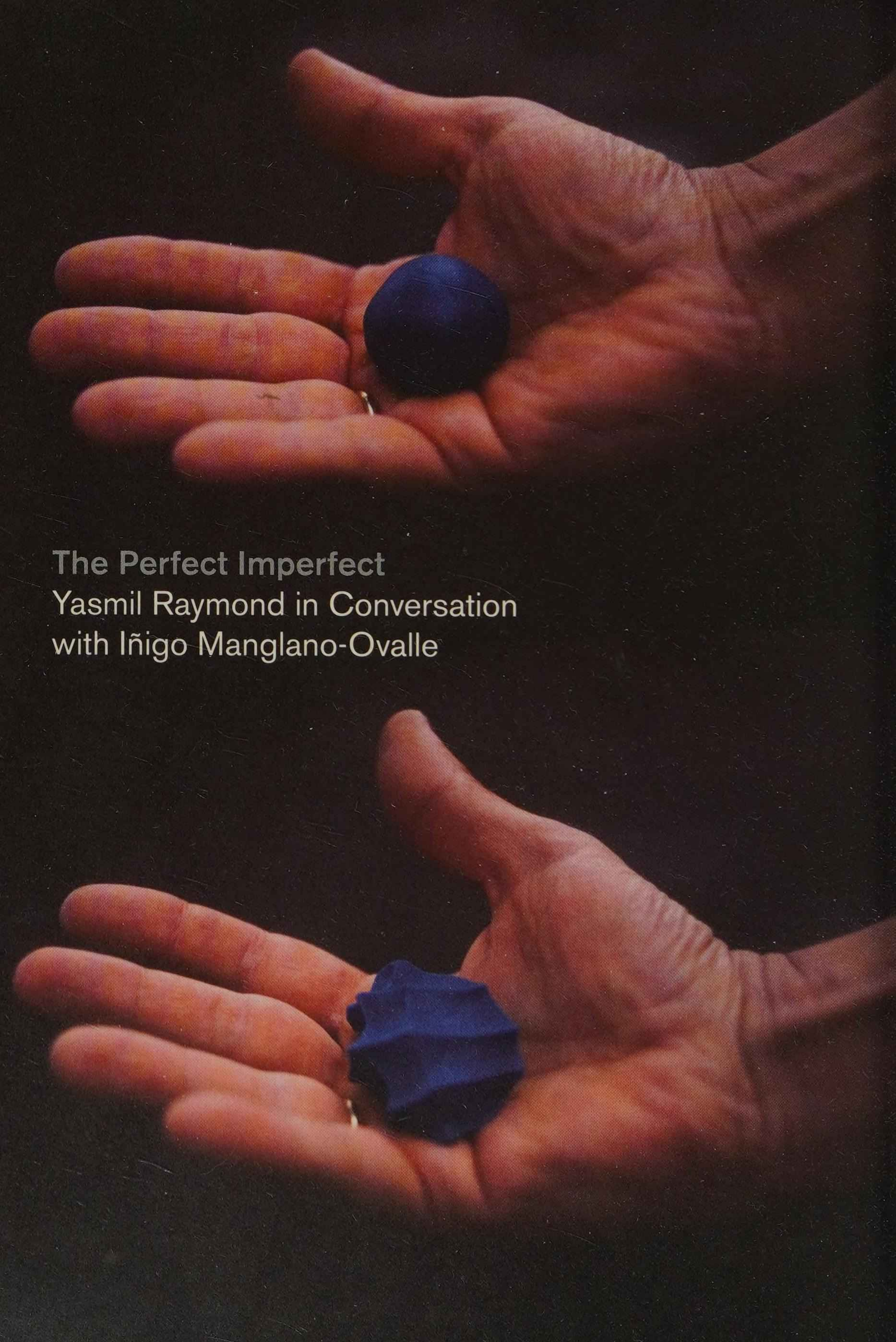
41° N, 74° W, 2002





Plume, 2003





The Perfect Imperfect

Yasmil Raymond in Conversation with Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle

Yasmil Raymond: Among other concepts, your work in this exhibition examines the notion of climate as a gauge of conditions, events, or positions. At the same time, a more literal and formal reference to weather becomes apparent. Do you remember when you began to take an interest in forms such as clouds and icebergs?

Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle: I didn't realize that I was dealing with clouds or meteorology so consistently until I completed *Cloud Prototype No. 1* (2003). I was organizing a lecture and began to thread back, which took me to 1998 and a piece called *Sonambulo II (blue)*. Then I realized I could go further back to *The El Niño Effect*, which was completed in 1997. However, I don't think these pieces related directly to a fascination with meteorology, but rather an interest in politics—the politics of migration, of globalization, of movement. The cloud or the iceberg serve as metaphors or vehicles for movement or for visualizing movement. You can't actually see movement unless you have a vehicle. I mean, nobody has made a painting of wind.

YR: Some artists have tried.

IMO: Robert Barry released two cubic feet of helium in the Mojave Dessert, but that was a release, not a capture. I didn't set out to make art that was about the visualization of a phenomenon, but rather to think about "climate," expand on the term and determine what it is—to embark beyond the meteorological and move toward political, social, or economic climates. For that reason, I'm not looking for the shape but for a way to present the *idea* of an iceberg or a cloud. Then I almost always start by thinking about how the idea will be represented even before I know where I'm going to *get* the iceberg or *get* the cloud. I want to construct a phenomenological experience or relationship between the viewer and the work, so the idea is not to set out to make a representation. In the end, it is always a kind of representation, but I am attempting to take one factor out of it. In other words, I don't sculpt the cloud or the iceberg out of thin air. I try to create some distance between the notion of the artist's hand and the sublime. That puts me in the position of having to go out and find data—and in this world everyone is gathering data on everything—but it takes time to figure out who is doing it, and who is doing it best.

YR: You mentioned *The El Niño Effect* as a possible beginning for this body of work. Would you say then that *Cloud Prototype No. 1* formalized the question of climate in your work?

IMO: It's a strange trajectory of how things begin to relate. After *The El Niño Effect*, I began a number of works that took place in Mies van der Rohe buildings: *Climate (2000)*, *Le Baiser/The Kiss (2000)*, and *Alltagszeit (In Ordinary Time)* (2001). *The El Niño Effect* was dealing with a kind of high modernism—in a sculptural sense, the history of high modernism in art. The Mies projects were dealing with architecture and social climates, and after completing these pieces I had become known as the artist obsessed with Mies. I felt that people didn't really understand that in the end, Mies was to me like the cloud—a metaphor for something else. I am not a scholar of Mies but am more interested in what modernist architecture purported to be, what it came to be, and what it meant. At that point, I thought I needed to make a radical shift because my practice has always been based on radical shifts. One of the things I wanted to do was to move from an idea of the supposedly stable site of high modernism to a kind of fluid site of contemporary architecture and critique these things.

YR: So, how did you begin to relate the metaphors of climate to new forms in contemporary architecture versus the modernist ideals and structures contained in the Mies work? How does *Climate*, for example, differ from *Cloud Prototype No. 1* in this respect?

IMO: Well, both talk about factors of globalization in two different ways. *Climate* addresses a particular way of looking at globalization, both historically and in possible scenarios of the future. The cloud is another way of looking at that same thing but considers in a more direct way the architecture of the form itself, and how the tools that help generate contemporary architecture have become a driving force behind the forms that are created. The advent of fractals and chaos theory has made looking at arbitrary patterns an integral part of constructing forms. In architecture there is this interesting back and forth between the willing and the random. Mies' work is totally willful and is upfront about the process. The use of computers in contemporary architecture applies the notion of generated forms—machines can generate forms and artists can push them in the same way that an architect can help visualize ideas. But it is very much an instance of willing into being, so it has this pretense of the organic or the chaotic, but becomes totally sculptural. Frank Gehry's designs, apart from using new technology, can be tied to 1920s concepts of collage and Cubism. But the materiality and the forms purport to be an idea of the future or the new. I believe this method is an investigation of an old sculptural way of thinking.

YR: We've been discussing a particular trajectory in your work and the use of new tools and technology to produce it. However, your concepts seem to be grounded or inspired by the generation that preceded you. How do you relate to the conceptual artists in particular?

IMO: I try to be very tied to that generation. In my work, the idea is a priori. So it is very connected to the advent of conceptual art practice. The difference is that the work produced by later generations gets mucked up with form. I try to address that moment of practice and attempt in some way to be faithful to certain concepts while allowing myself to address others.

For example, *Le Baiser/The Kiss*, my first Mies project, was done at the Farnsworth House in Plano, Illinois. This was as much of a critique as it was an homage to Mies and to high modernism in architecture—but it was also a kind of playing out of an Allan Kaprow Happening or like Mierle Laderman Ukele washing the floor at the Wadsworth Athenaeum (in 1973). To some extent, *The El Niño Effect* looked at Robert Morris' notes on sculpture—the tanks that I used in that piece are very similar to the white, polygonal fiberglass works that he was making in the 1970s. *Cloud Prototype No. 1* in a way references early Sol LeWitt work and the setting up of a formula or a system that progresses.

Those works were addressing a kind of politics as well—they were looking at a particular moment when the industrial economy was moving to a service economy. If you look at this work on a formal level, then you can be mistaken as to what the content is. If you look at it like a social critique, then you can understand that Morris, LeWitt, and Kaprow were actually engaging in a liberation from an object-based economy and seeing how they could activate different systems of making. Once those gestures were made and done, the repetition of them becomes formulaic—hence formal. In a way, this "LeWittian" process of taking a mathematical formula and extending it out is a way to release it from the artist's hand or gesture—it simply becomes instructions on a piece of paper that someone else can execute.

YR: Jorge Luis Borges asked in his poem *Clouds II*, "What are the clouds? An architecture of chance?" When I saw *Cloud Prototype No. 1* for the first time, it brought up ontological questions of being and existence—and maybe we are running in a different direction here—but are these questions present in your conception of the work?

IMO: In many ways, I think we know clouds through language. Luke Howard, an English pharmacist and amateur meteorologist, gave a lecture in 1802 in which he actually named the clouds—cumulonimbus, stratus, and cirrus. What is really interesting is that he had a great affect on poets such as Goethe and Byron and painters such as Turner. All of a sudden you start to see paintings where the clouds begin to represent the real shape. If you look at Western painting before 1802, clouds are just kind of ideas. So what was interesting to me is that language gave form, not the artist.

You are asking about continuity—but what I was trying to do at that time was make this break that I mentioned earlier. Having worked with Mies in my earlier projects, I was looking for another sort of character to work with. I was thinking of Dante's *Inferno* and Virgil guiding the narrator through hell, so I was searching for someone who would be *our* guide. I thought of Robert Oppenheimer as our Virgil—the destroyer and then the conscience—the idea of an unconscious creator who, having made the horrific, falls.

YR: Let's talk about relevancy, about the projects of Joseph Beuys. I think about politics a lot in your art—not political art, but politics applied to art, or how you speak of weather as something that lacks ideology, even though we attribute current events to it. Do you see any of what Beuys did as influential?

IMO: Well, it is interesting you bring up Beuys, because I was just in Kassel, Germany, and was developing a project for them, and here I am confronted with one of Beuys' greatest pieces—except it has kind of vanished and is somewhere else.

YR: The *7000 Oaks*?

IMO: No, the Volkswagen bus with all of the sleds coming out of it (*The Pack*, 1969). I'm working on a project that is closely tied physically to the manifestation of that vehicle—the ambulance. Underneath the formal aspects, it starts as a notion of social sculpture but is also tied to the notion of disappearance. I went to a liberal arts college in Massachusetts, and was not a major in fine arts. A class I took on Joseph Beuys had a very big impact on me, in the sense that you could talk about politics and that there were different ways of writing, that language could be housed in things not necessarily acknowledged as forms of script, and that certain materials could become constructions of language. As a young artist, you take him in as an iconic figure, but the next thing you do is try to destroy it. So, you fall into the camp of critiquing Beuys as a kind of shamanistic producer. I probably spent a number of years thinking about the politics of the work—the magic show versus real engagement. It's only much later that you realize the guy in the wagon selling tonics was actually involved in a radical political act, playing around with structures and academia and the construction of politics itself as well as both the object and object-making.

So someone like Beuys was really important to me and it is really interesting that now, because of some sort of coincidence, the trajectory has come together with this project in Kassel. I have been dealing with weather for the longest time, so now that I'm con-

scious of it, or somebody made me conscious of it, what do I have to say about it? How do I make it relevant now? When I did *Sonambulo II (blue)* (1999), it was a critique of systems of social denial, and I was using the new-age industry as a way to talk about escapism. But when we constructed *Sonambulo II (blue)*, the idea of the summer rainstorm coming and going didn't include the idea of the politics of weather. The politics was a system of camouflage, the creation of the real to address the presentation of the artificial. So every once in awhile those moments …

YR: Become conscious?

IMO: Yes, become conscious. One of the things that has changed is that I used to think the ethical decisions an artist must contend with are like the consciousness of the larger body of society, and that one must make conscious decisions or ethical decisions within that context. Then I began to realize that this would always be a strategy of opportunism, and that one would relegate one's work to an area of ethics that was very much like ethical conduct. I became much more interested in a muddier area, which was aesthetics. Now the ethics that become involved are in that conscious moment when you look at yourself and ask, "Should I be doing this, do I want to be doing this, is it relevant that I am doing this?" Even in one's own trajectory of practice—rather than always looking out and saying should *they* be doing it, should *we* be doing it? That is an argument of ethics that I am involved in—politically, of course. But in terms of art, it is about the idea of making meaning. In the strategy of art as ethical conduct, you are always searching for something meaningful, and in that sort of construction everything is about a kind of recognition.

YR: When looking at *Cloud Prototype no. 1* or your film installations, I immediately formulate questions of beauty, but there is that fine line between the beautiful and the grotesque—what we can identify or what we reject. With *Cloud Prototype no. 1*, you are immediately attracted to the form as you walk in the gallery—the shininess—and it is so seductive and perfect. Then you get close and see evidence of the imperfections of a machine-made thing, and you also notice that it has involved the hand. You can be a little repulsed by it, because it has the feeling of a potential weapon. In the process of creating this piece, are you constantly fighting that double force of seduction and rejection, certain beauty and certain ugliness?

IMO: I'm constantly battling the notion that these two things are diametrically opposed. And I was trying to create situations where they exist at the same time.

They can't coexist in the object or the material, and they can't coexist in the form, because the idea could be the monstrous. So the cloud holds the monstrous, and the inception is the explosion. And the form is driven by the question of how to make this thing beautiful, so they can't be housed there, either. So these two things come together in the experience of the form and in the consciousness. And when does that happen? I'm not sure if it happens when you approach the work. Maybe you read the label, and this UFO-looking thing, this shiny chrome object is really a cloud. And then you find out that its not just a cloud but a storm, and then you find out that it is a real storm.

YR: So the physicality of it begins to creep in.

IMO: What I'm saying is that this is part of getting closer to it, and perhaps one of the things I'm interested in is not trying to figure out how objects can contain these two diametrically opposed concepts, but how

I can create objects that offer up the opportunity for the viewer to grapple with those things at the same time. I don't want to fall into that positivist camp where you say it is all in the hands of the viewer and they have the final interpretation. This is giving some sort of liberation to the viewer—I don't want to liberate the viewer at all, I actually want to impose on them an ethical dilemma out of which they liberate themselves. My art is not the vehicle for liberation, my imposition is a question placed onto them that they must grapple with.

YR: I see the iceberg as a continuation of your interest in architecture—the manifestation of this idea of the iceberg as a structure and what architecture is trying to do. How did these pieces come about? Besides, you got these drawings from the scientists that are monitoring icebergs. In the actual construction, did you decide the scale? How did that work in the studio for you?

IMO: Well, that was a tricky project because the data came to us as almost an Excel spreadsheet—three columns that were x, y, and z coordinates and thousands and thousands of rows of data. So essentially they had given us the plotting points of the surface of this iceberg—its depth or height in relevance to its position.

YR: This is a still picture of one second of the iceberg's life, right?

IMO: Well, the cloud is one second within the duration of the storm, which took many hours to develop—but the cloud is one second. The iceberg is probably more than one second, because they are going around this iceberg with sonar under the boat and radar above the boat and are sort of mapping.

YR: Is there no system there? How is the data organized?

IMO: The data is spatially organized, but as I said, it is a nonhierarchical form. The character I was dealing with was Buckminster Fuller. When I was grappling with this thing, it was sort of like grappling with another utopian visionary. He probably will become an even stronger figure not just for me, but culturally as we continue down our trajectory.

YR: I think that you are offering us authority by projecting it—we as viewers take that authority, assign certain meaning, and then do the work. I suppose that is why your work is interesting to me, because it forces me to do work, but it is not an easy thing.

IMO: I like the idea of the imposition—that the viewer must do the work. The viewer also has a choice of saying, "No, this doesn't interest me" and walk away. I like that idea. For example, at the Rochester Art Center, we are bringing in *Sonambulo II (blue)* and then putting *Plume* in a room with red window tinting. So in one room there is a gunshot that creates the storm, and then in the other room is a storm that looks like a mushroom cloud. I think there are probably ways that one can experience the work by being in the room and either listening or looking, by being bathed by blue or red, by listening to the sound track or looking at the photographs. You get information about the work from the label, and you can understand the work is really a representation or a construction of something. Then you have to have a second experience—and that is where you do the work.

YR: That is the thing with art. It takes seconds—you have the first encounter with the work, and that is one experience. We cannot return to that initial experience because we go in the direction of the label or the information.

IMO: In other artists' work there can be this idea of the unknown. The strategy that I use

is that you start with the known. I realize that the viewers will come in and look at my work and see formalism or abstraction, and I need to give them this known quality or experience, and then I need to break it apart.

YR: Yes, because they will not know that this is a gunshot until much later.

IMO: Or, in the DNA portrait that we are doing for Rochester, I want people to come in and be embraced by a huge amount of color field portraits—sort of an abstract representation of color theory—and then find out that there are individual signatures behind this. So you'll see a series of 3,000 dots, and it will be a formal, linear application of color. And then that gets broken down because it becomes information, but it's your information, so it becomes the idea of *us* as information. So all of this breaks down.

YR: When did *Random Sky* happen, right after the iceberg?

IMO: Yes, we then presented a piece called *Vanishing Sky*, which is a dark room and multiple projections of pure data. It's totally generated by the computer within a specific set of parameters. When you walk in and your eyes adjust, you get the idea that you are looking at a starry night unfolding. In reality, you are looking at this computer that says, "We are going to create a universe and dismantle this universe star by star, and this goes on forever and it is never the same." For Rochester Art Center I don't want to create a dark room, so we'll bring in this piece called *Random Sky*, which is bar lines of blue and white that are continually breaking themselves apart.

YR: And this is also computer-generated?

IMO: To a certain extent, but it is also affected by a weather station—so weather is affecting the video itself.

YR: Artificial and natural.

IMO: Right. The first time we presented *Random Sky*, the weather station was outside of the building, but in Rochester it is going to be inside, so we will be talking about the climate in the gallery, and it will be talking about architecture, or maybe museums, or art as having its own microclimate—and the sustainability of that, because that is what architecture does in terms of climate. So here the weather station goes in and sort of acknowledges this stable climate.

YR: Which may not be stable.

IMO: No, it is going to be fluctuating all of the time—slightly. But for the Rochester Art Center we'll program the equipment itself to receive the most subtle shifts. So the program will be highly active in the gallery, even though there isn't a storm there. It will take all of the little fluctuations and create a storm of data from them.

YR: So you are not only the weatherman, you are also the weather creator?

IMO: Yes, that is interesting. Am I creating weather? Maybe I am in the way that Luke Howard created the clouds—just by naming them. By the very fact of putting a weather station in that space, you are making weather just by saying there is weather here—so, you are actually making weather. So yes, that is weird.

Yasmil Raymond, *Assistant Curator,*
Walker Art Center,
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Chicago, May 27, 2006

Detail from ***Random Sky,*** 2006

Exhibition checklist.

Recumbent Iceberg (r11i01) 2005–2006
Aluminum tubes, rapid-prototyped
ABS plastic and nylon, USB drive
Approximately 25 x 20 x 18 feet

Black Berg (r390i02) 2006
Aluminum tubes, rapid-prototyped
ABS plastic and nylon, latex balloon,
USB drive
39 x 58 x 79 inches

Cloud Prototype no. 1 2003
Fiberglass and titanium alloy foil
132 x 176 x 96 inches

Random Sky 2006
7680 x 1024 resolution continuous real-time
digital output; single channel, 3-projection screens;
weather transmitter with temperature, barometric,
wind speed and direction instrumentation; and
5.1 surround sound
30 feet x 7.5 feet

Plume 2003
Color photographs laminated to Plexiglas
2 panels, each 47.75 x 57.5 inches

Sonambulo II (blue) 1999
CD audio recording, speakers, woofer
and cabinets, blue tinted window film
22 feet x 18 feet x 16 feet

Sonambulo III (Infrared) 2003
Infrared video on LCD panel
10 inches x 15 inches

41° N, 74° W 2002
Two parabolic speakers mounted
to the ceiling, audio CD
Dimensions variable

Time 2006
Paint on wall
288 inches x 174 inches

Portrait of a Young Reader 2006
Enamel paint on steel
.375 inches x 161 feet

Red Fist 2006
Epoxy
2.25 x 1.5 x 1 inches

Biography.

Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle was born in 1961, in Madrid, Spain, and currently lives and works in Chicago, Illinois. He received B.A. degrees in Art and Art History as well as Latin American and Spanish literature from Williams College in Williamstown, Massachusetts in 1983. In 1989, he completed his M.F.A. degree in sculpture from The School of The Art Institute of Chicago. Described as "one of his generation's most compelling, socially-engaged and celebrated young artists", Manglano-Ovalle investigates diverse subjects such as technology, climate, immigration and the global impact of social, political, environmental, and scientific systems. Often working in partnership or employing technical experts across multiple disciplines including engineering, architecture, genomics, and climatology, Manglano-Ovalle produces objects that are often technically complex, formally captivating, and conceptually engaging. His early work focused on collaborative explorations with young people in his hometown of Chicago, which led to the founding of Street-Level Youth Media, a community arts organization for youth in 1993. Across multiple independent projects executed during the same period, Manglano-Ovalle explored a multi-faceted and socially-focused approach to art making, blending layered concepts with a variety of materials both typical and unorthodox. Incorporating objects such as identification cards in Assigned Identities (1991) or automobile tires in Flotilla (1991), Manglano-Ovalle made reference to the difficulties surrounding illegal immigration into the United States. In the sculptural works Bloom (1995–96) and Subwoofer (1995), Manglano-Ovalle utilized ballistic gelatin, firearms and car sound systems to explore notions of violence and division. His noted film trilogy Le Baiser/The Kiss (1999), Climate (2000), and In Ordinary Time (2001) focused on the architecture of Mies van der Rohe and the implications of Modernism. More recently, he has employed genomic and meteorological methodologies to explore issues of race, identity, and the promise and threat of technology in works such as Cloud Prototype No. 1 (2003) and Portrait of a Young Reader (2006).

Manglano-Ovalle has exhibited his work at acclaimed institutions both nationally and internationally. Selected one-person exhibitions include Focus: Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle, The Art Institute of Chicago (2005), The Krefeld Suite, Museum Haus Esters and Haus Lange, Krefend, Germany (2005), Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle, El Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Monterrey and Museo Tamayo Arte Contemporaneo, Mexico City (2004), Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle, Sala de Exposiciones de la Fundación "la Caixa", Madrid, Spain (2003), White Flags, Barcelona Pavilion, Fundación Mies van der Rohe, Barcelona, Spain (2002), and Balsero, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (1997), among many others. Group exhibitions include the Liverpool Biennial (2004 and 2006), Moving Pictures, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York and Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, Spain (2002 and 2003), Tempo, Museum of Modern Art, New York (2002), Bienal de São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil (1998), and the Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2000). He has received the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation fellowship (2001), the Media Arts Award from the Wexner Center for the Arts (1997), and a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship (1995).

Currently Manglano-Ovalle is commissioned to present a new work at Documenta 12, Kassel, Germany (2007). He is represented by Max Protetch Gallery, New York.





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