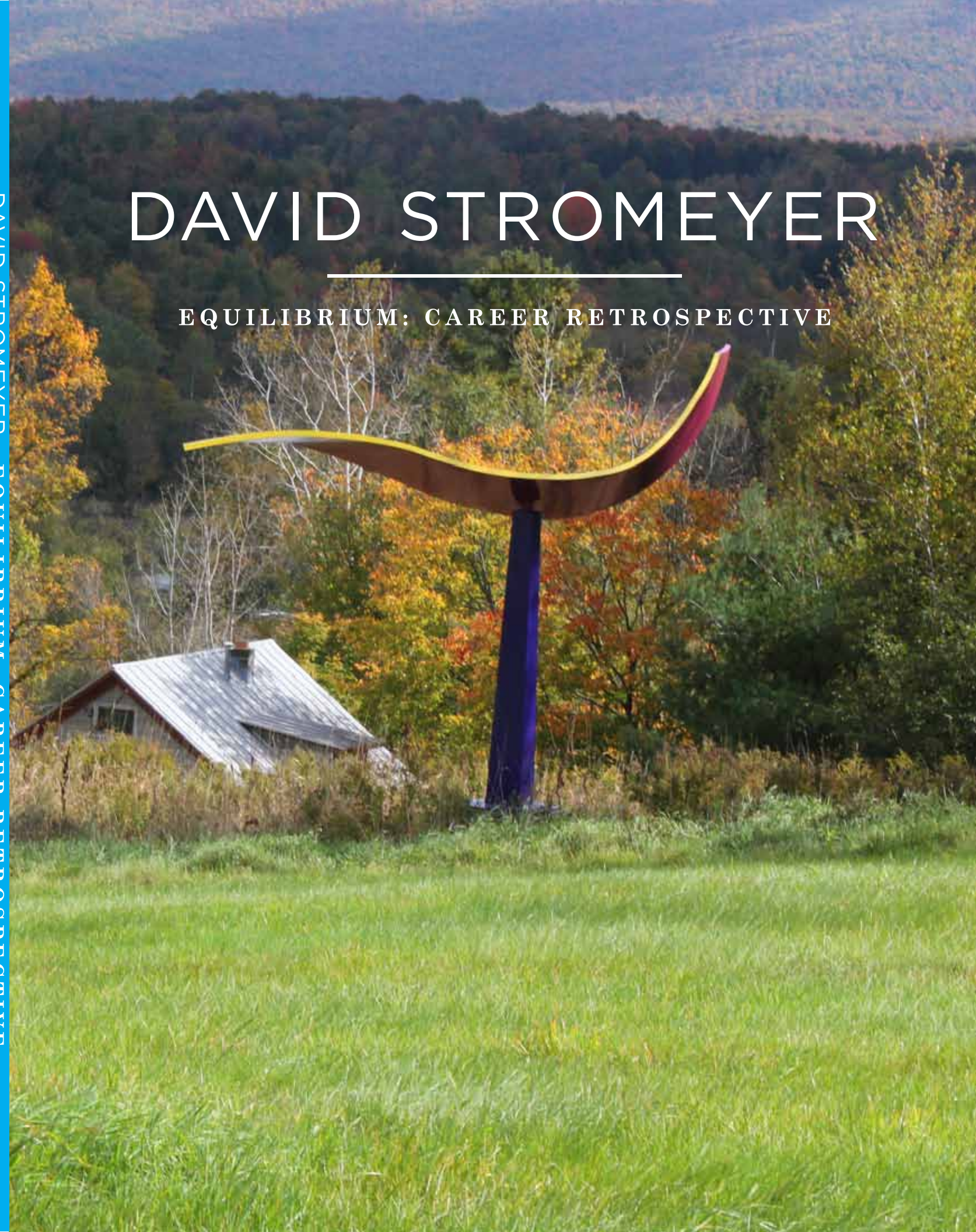




DAVID STROMEYER EQUILIBRIUM: CAREER RETROSPECTIVE

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# DAVID STROMEYER

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**EQUILIBRIUM: CAREER RETROSPECTIVE**

**JUNE 29 - SEPTEMBER 8, 2012  
BCA CENTER, BURLINGTON, VERMONT**

CHIEF CURATOR: Chris Thompson  
ESSAYS: Chris Thompson, Courtney Lynch, Jasmine Parsia  
ART DIRECTION / DESIGN: Ted Olson  
PHOTOGRAPHY: Raychel Severance, Fran Stoddard, Jasmine Parsia, Ted Olson  
EDITOR: Jessica Dyer

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## CURATOR'S INTRODUCTION

Christopher Thompson  
Chief Curator and Exhibitions Director  
BCA Center, Burlington, Vermont

BCA Center's exhibition *David Stromeyer: Equilibrium: Career Retrospective*, represents a long-deserved acknowledgement of one of Vermont's most important artists, featuring dozens of sculptures, photos, films and maquettes from his forty-year career, along with five large-scale outdoor sculptures from two different series. These outdoor works, installed in Burlington's City Hall Park and Church Street pedestrian mall, include three of Stromeyer's *Rock Studies* and two never before exhibited works from his *Twist* series.

What is surprising about David Stromeyer's sculpture is the way it exists in the landscape. More specifically, the way it exists in the Vermont landscape. Undeniably his works are monolithic. At ten, fifteen, twenty feet high, their scale only becomes apparent when you are directly adjacent to them. It is also only in this close proximity that the weight of their construction—welded, cold-bent, half-ton steel plates—becomes apparent. Their colors belie the mass. Their fluorescent forms seem to float across the fields like the autumn leaves that Vermont is so well known for. This is how I first experienced Stromeyer's work at his bucolic homegrown sculpture park/studio in Enosburg Falls, Vermont. As you emerge from his modest home, rolling hilltop fields unfurl around you. Surprise turns into delight as you crest the first slope and again when you pass through hedgerows from one field into the next; each is populated with dozens of carefully-sited steel giants. Close to the Canadian border, comprising two hundred acres, the impression rivals that of the Hudson River Valley's magnificent Storm King Sculpture Park. What is staggering in this case is that all of the work is by a single artist, quietly assembled over a forty-year career. When Stromeyer purchased the land forty years ago, soon to graduate from Dartmouth and UCLA, it contained only a tumbled down farmhouse. Gradually over the intervening years, Stromeyer constructed a world-class steel sculpture studio, with multiple overhead cranes and a massive hydraulic press for cold bending his work's half-ton 5/8" steel plates. Then one by one he created, sited and often repeatedly re-sited the pieces. Today Stromeyer's property is perhaps the single most inspiring and important art destination in Vermont; one which is almost completely unknown to outside visitors.

Rooted in Abstract Expressionism, with its emphasis on the raw, direct expression of emotion through energetic use of color, line and form, Stromeyer's early 1970's works of unfinished steel were inspired by Russian Constructivists and artists such as David Smith and Mark di Suvero. By contrast his more recent works, with their impeccable industrial finishes and arresting, sports car colors equally elicit the work of Minimalist, Donald Judd. The effect of Stromeyer's sculpture when experienced in the Vermont landscape is transcendent. Vividly chromatic, these monoliths seem to emerge shimmering from the soil of the fields. The feeling is reminiscent of another ecstatic Vermont cultural experience: Peter Schumann's *Bread and Puppet Theater*. In Glover, Vermont, during their weekly outdoor summer performances there is a particular moment when the audience catches its first glimpse—mirage-like—of Schumann's towering, two-story-tall paper mache marionettes. They slowly emerge and vanish, as they approach, gliding over distant hilltops, surrounded by their white-clad puppeteers. The same sensation is captured by Stromeyer's work; disbelief followed by awe.

The BCA Center wishes to thank all of those who made this exhibition possible: the artist David Stromeyer, his incredibly supportive wife, Sarah L. Stromeyer; our supporters: The National Endowment for the Arts, Sandra Berbeco, Seven Days Newspaper, Kelliher Samets Volk, Free Press Media and Green Mountain Coffee. We would also like to thank the contributors to this catalogue: essayists assistant curator Courtney Lynch and curatorial fellow Jasmine Anastasia Parsia, designer Ted Olson and photographer Raychel Severence. We would like to thank all of our volunteers, Burlington's superintendent of park operations Deryk Roach, and Kerri Macon, our BCA Center manager whose perseverance and attention to detail ensured the success of this complex exhibition. Finally, we would like to express our appreciation to the hundreds of thousands of visitors to Burlington's downtown whose unexpected pleasure and enthusiasm we share each time they experience David Stromeyer's magnificent works for the first time.

## INTERACTIVE LANDSCAPES

Jasmine Parsia  
BCA Center Gallery Fellow

Hidden within the hills and meadows, David Stromeyer's studio remains somewhat of a secret in Vermont. Though he encourages visitors throughout the duration of his exhibit at The BCA Center, those in neighboring towns say that they never realized such a place existed. Over forty sculptures dot the green meadows of the land, punctuated by his home and studio. While they are hidden treasures in the town of Enosburg, they bloom in their new prominent place in Burlington's City Hall Park for *David Stromeyer's Equilibrium: Career Retrospective*.

Stromeyer's sculptures are not site-specific. Rather, they are arguably nomadic in nature. Stromeyer's sculptures are equally engaging in his Vermont meadows as they are in the buzzing downtown area of Burlington's City Hall Park. In line with the nature of the nomadic, the sculptures are defined by their environment. In the grassy meadows of Enosburg, the sculptures were pops of color with air to breathe. In their migration to Burlington, surrounded by trees and buildings, their scale seems to have doubled; the public is able to interact with the sculptures closely and without reservation at all hours of the day. In this new context, the viewer's experience with the sculptures can truly flourish. Unlike art within a gallery, the interaction between the audience and the sculptures is not mediated by the commonly enforced etiquette of the gallery. There are no black ropes or looming signs that say "Please do not touch." Outside in the park, the divide between audience and artwork is absent.

This essence of accessibility is best captured by his sculpture *Rumba* (2012), a tall and twisting sculpture found at the back of the park. From the

outside, *Rumba's* green and purple walls fold and unfold as the viewer walks around the piece. With *Rumba*, Stromeyer presents an alternative idea of architecture: why must our walls always be straight and level, what happens when they are swooping and twisting? *Rumba* is reliant on the crossover from spectator to participant—the viewer is invited to step inside and explore its shape-shifting qualities. *Rumba* has been opened up for the viewer; creating a shelter, presenting planar changes with swooping and twisted walls.

David Stromeyer's interest in the public's engagement with his work is reminiscent of Richard Serra's desire for the public to interact with his piece *Titled Arc*. Though Stromeyer's sculptures have not proven to be widely controversial, as it was with Serra's, the roots of their interests are linked. The reception of *Titled Arc* relied on the dialogue created with the viewer. In an explanation to the public, Serra stated, "The viewer becomes aware of himself and his movement through the plaza. As he moves, the sculpture changes. Contraction and expansion of the sculpture results from the viewer's movement. Step by step, the perception of not only the sculpture but the entire environment changes."<sup>1</sup> In the same way, Stromeyer's work is reliant upon public engagement. Without the movement and interaction of the public, the sculptures remain quietly static. Away from the quiet Enosburg hills and into the city of Burlington, in the presence of countless viewers, the sculptures evolve into a public dialogue.



**ENOSBURG,  
VERMONT**

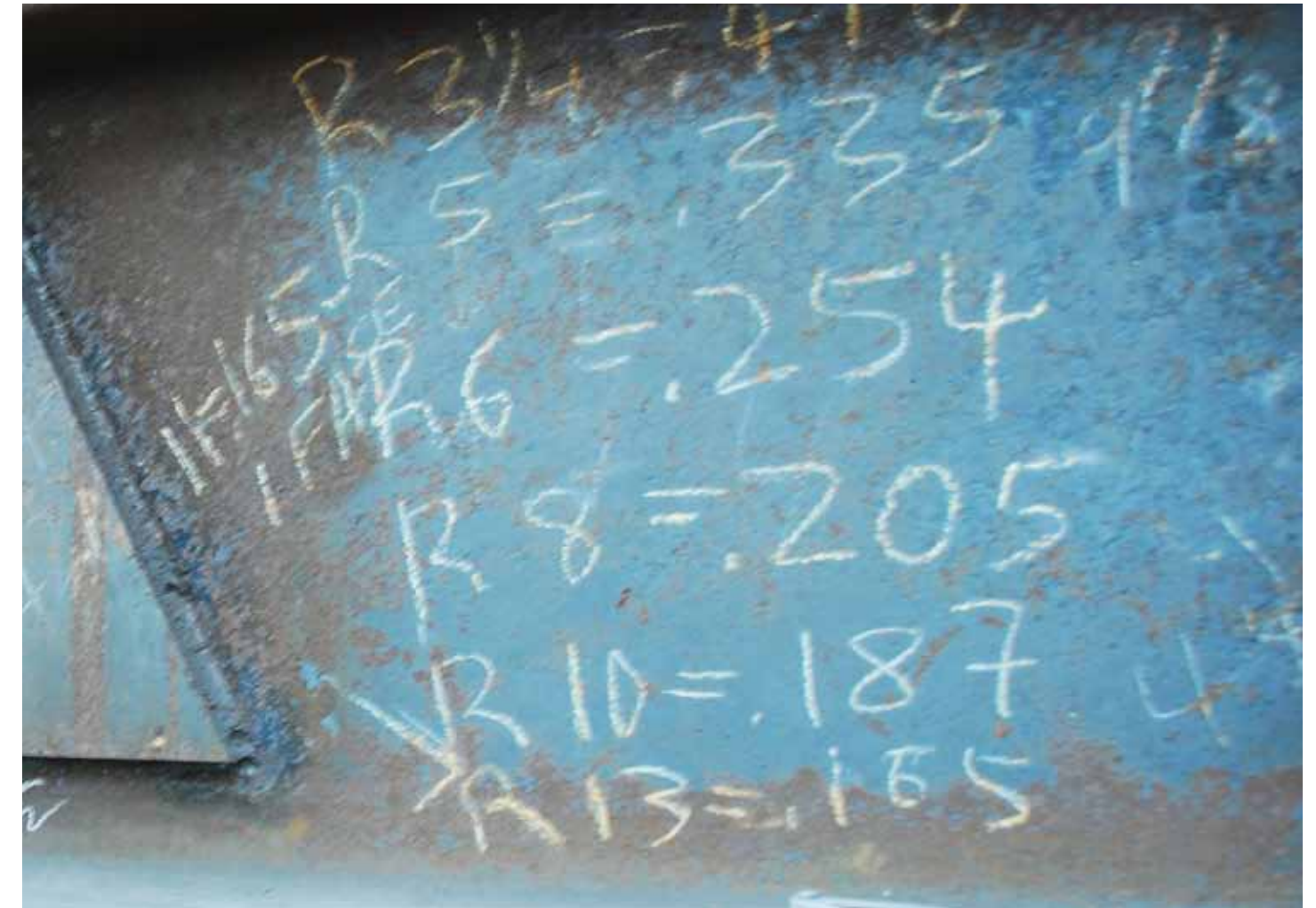
*I don't have an engineering degree,  
but I just kind of know steel, working  
with it all the time.*

—DS









*Then I started really pushing material around, treating it in a much more plastic way. At that point I was doing things you could only do with metals.*

—DS









*Early on I didn't want to put color on my work, you'll see some early pieces where I was manipulating very little other than assembling shapes in a kind of Russian Constructivist approach.*

—DS



*I went into the winter here one time in a very strange mental state. I wasn't able to make decisions, everything seemed equally good to me—and that's very unusual for me. I figured this is not going to be a good winter to spend in Vermont, let's do something different. I went to New York and lived with a friend who's an architect and he had a loft downtown. I decided to shake things up. I painted that winter.... So I was painting and that got me thinking more and more about color.... At that point I didn't need to say the surface was steel in order to convey what was going on. And I could play with it more. It opened up a whole other venue. It started with a single color. Then I started coloring edges, then I went to multi-colors as I gained more confidence.*

—DS









***I tried to create themes, like writing a piece of music, musical compositions, and then tried to embellish the themes as I went on.***

—DS  
pictured: *Rhapsody in Blue*, 1998















*...a lot of my pieces have an interior space. I was very interested early on with at what point are you inside a piece and how do all of your perceptions change—sound, light, kinesthetically...so in this piece you actually have an enclosure that you're very clearly inside.*

—DS  
pictured: *Look Homeward*, 1996





**BURLINGTON,  
VERMONT**





# DAVID STROMEYER: EQUILIBRIUM: A RETROSPECTIVE

Courtney Lynch  
BCA Center Assistant Curator

The exhibition, *David Stromeier: Equilibrium: A Retrospective*, presented at The BCA Center, spans the course of Stromeier's nearly 40-year career as a nationally-acclaimed sculptor. Beyond the gallery space, visitors are invited to explore additional works unconventionally placed on the Church Street Marketplace and in Burlington's City Hall Park. This exhibition is born of an interest in public engagement, and has a deep investment in calling Vermonters' attention to the works' origin: Stromeier's nearly 200-acre Sculpture Park in Enosburg, Vermont.

David Stromeier began working with large-scale steel structures as early as the mid-1970's. In the *Retrospective*, smaller work evolves throughout the gallery, displaying a definitive progression of line, form and shape that conveys the changing style, constant experimentation and emerging aesthetic concerns fostered over the course of his career. Upon entering the gallery, the viewer is greeted on the left with works from the 1970's and 80's, contrasted against the early 2000's on the right. The difference between the two sets the tone for the depth of the works' evolution; while the earlier work seems rooted in steel's inherent industrial qualities—displaying metallic colors and geometric lines—the later work implies a developing interest in organic form.

Stromeier's sculptures are fundamentally inseparable from their origins in construction. Not only does steel give rise to the impression of

industry, but Stromeier's career began with Constructivist leanings and an interest in architecture.<sup>1</sup> However, while earlier works convey a concern for the more traditional, industrial form expected from such a material—such as the I-beam-like shape of *Oh! Ooh! Ah!* (1979), or the bolt reference in *Flashed Cube* (1977)—the rest of the gallery depicts a gradual progression into more natural forms and mediums, such as *Three Rock Relief* (2006) or the rock-to-model series that would eventually become *Faceted Rock* (2004).

Amidst the visible experimentation with a variety of forms, methods and materials on display in the gallery, Stromeier has consistently produced the large-scale, freestanding sculptural pieces that have come to define his style. Five of these pieces steal the show as the exhibition continues beyond the gallery walls into Burlington's City Hall Park and Church Street Marketplace. *Faceted Rock* (2004), *Slice Rock* (2004) and *Plate Rock* (2004) pay homage to geological process, while *Rumba* (2012) and *Pasa Doble* (2012) twist and move with bright colors that call to mind the sweeping dances for which they are named.

It is in these large, more recent works that this forty-year progression is made most apparent—both in Burlington and at the Sculpture Park. These pieces have clearly freed themselves from the material's restrictions, venturing farther away from their industrial origins. Some embody natural, organic forms (such as the rock pieces on display

in Burlington) while others are inspired by more abstract sources, such as the kinetic sculptures on view in Enosburg. Stromeier's pieces convey none of the oppressive, formidable character afforded by their material. The open, seemingly effortless qualities of the visibly fluid lines and tilted shapes, as well as the liberal use of bright, colorful tones, give Stromeier's work a feeling of total accessibility. Viewers are invited to approach, circle, and—in some cases—even enter into the piece.

While standing in the presence of these sculptures, one cannot help but feel a nod to the mid-century Minimalists, whose theories implied that sculpture of this scale must be looked at from a distance and in full view in order to be fully experienced. "It is just this distance between the object and subject that creates a more extended situation, for physical participation becomes necessary,"<sup>2</sup> said Robert Morris in 1966. While this idea defined a movement, it is restricted by the central crux: that of viewer participation at a distance while experiencing a large sculptural piece as a whole. Stromeier, who began working in the mid-1970's, seems to have taken this philosophy one step further. Instead of relegating the work to the visual field, Stromeier defines his central question: "What happens when a viewer *approaches* a sculpture and parts of it fill his vision?"<sup>3</sup>

While similarly encouraging the viewer to experience these sculptural works from all angles—each in its setting, as a whole—Stromeier has worked at length to create captivating forms that welcome the

viewer *in*, figuratively (as the shapes demand closer inspection), as well as literally. Such as in the case of *Rumba* (2012), where the piece must be stepped *into* before the viewer is able to fully appreciate its form from all perspectives. In this way, the piece demands active participation (indeed, the viewer becomes all or partially *enveloped* by it) rather than functioning as monoliths too large or formidable to be truly accessed—visually or otherwise.

Placement is of vital concern to the translation of Stromeier's larger work. Whether visiting the park in Enosburg or coming across the transplanted sculptures in City Hall Park, the viewer gets the sense that he or she has stumbled upon art while not actively seeking such an experience. By bringing art to the landscape, urban or otherwise, Stromeier highlights the potential for art that exists beyond the scope of the gallery setting.

Through the various perspectives that the sculptures afford their audience, each piece in David Stromeier's *Retrospective* has achieved a distinctive sense of balance. Whether through the tension created between formidable steel shaped into an elegant twist, or the experience of art within and beyond the walls of the gallery, the dialogue is one of harmony. Industrial medium meets organic form; forbidding scale meets embracing lines; color, line and negative space come together to invite viewer participation.

2. Morris, Robert. "Notes on Sculpture 1-3." *Art in Theory 1900 - 2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*. Ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood. 2nd ed. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003. 828-35. Print.

3. Stromeier, David. "David Stromeier: The Process from Start to Finish of My Sculpture." *David Stromeier: The Process From Start to Finish of My Sculpture*. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 July 2012. davidstromeyer.com/about\_david\_stromeier.html.

1. Stromeier, David. "Home." *Large-Scale Metal Sculptures by David Stromeier*. David Stromeier, n.d. Web. 12 July 2012. davidstromeyer.com.











ONE 29 - SEPTEMBER 8, 2012

# DAVID STROMEYER



EQUILIBRIUM: CAREER RETROSPECTIVE

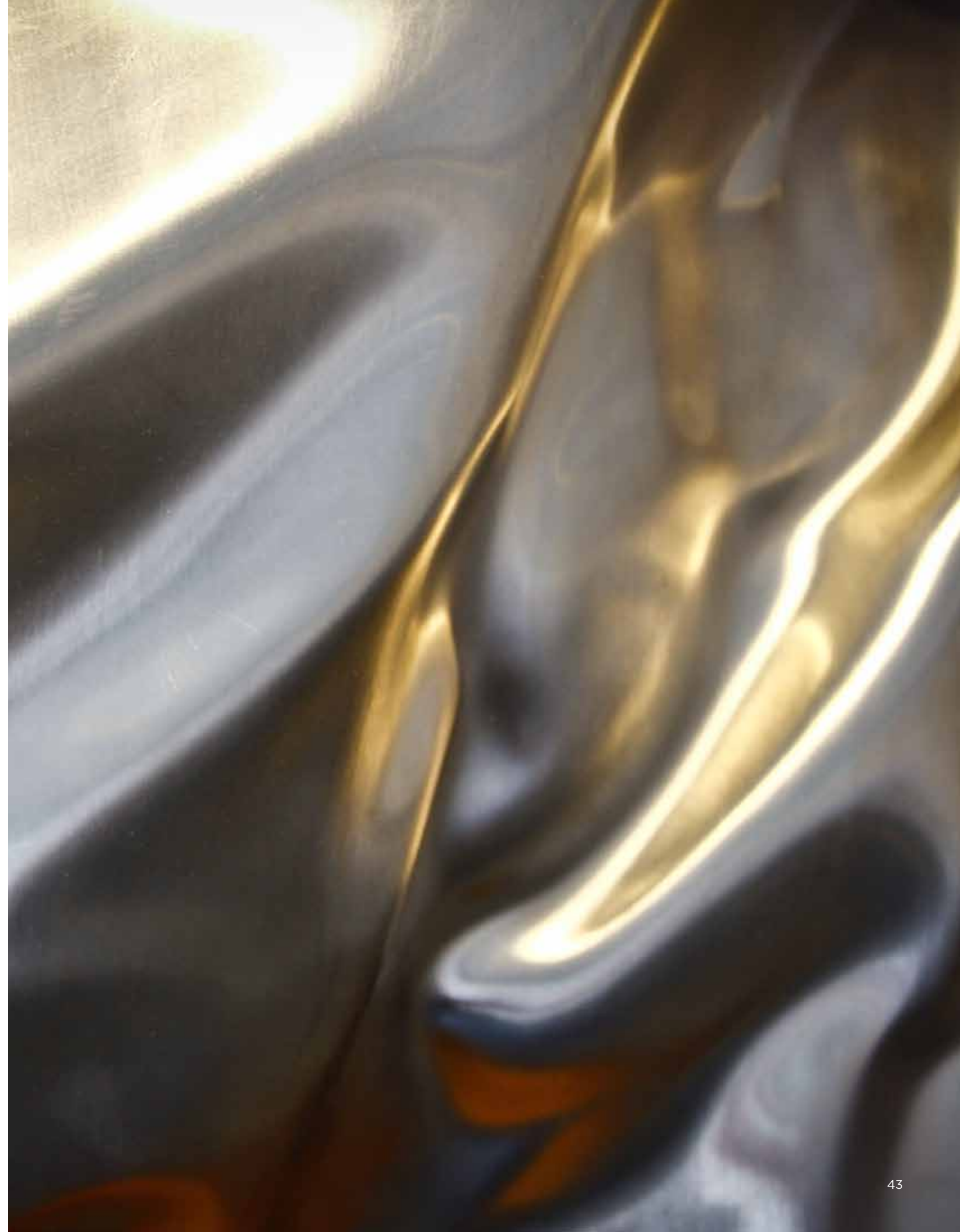








*Stainless Relief #2*, stainless steel, 1985







*Oh! Ooh! Ah!*, painted steel, 1979

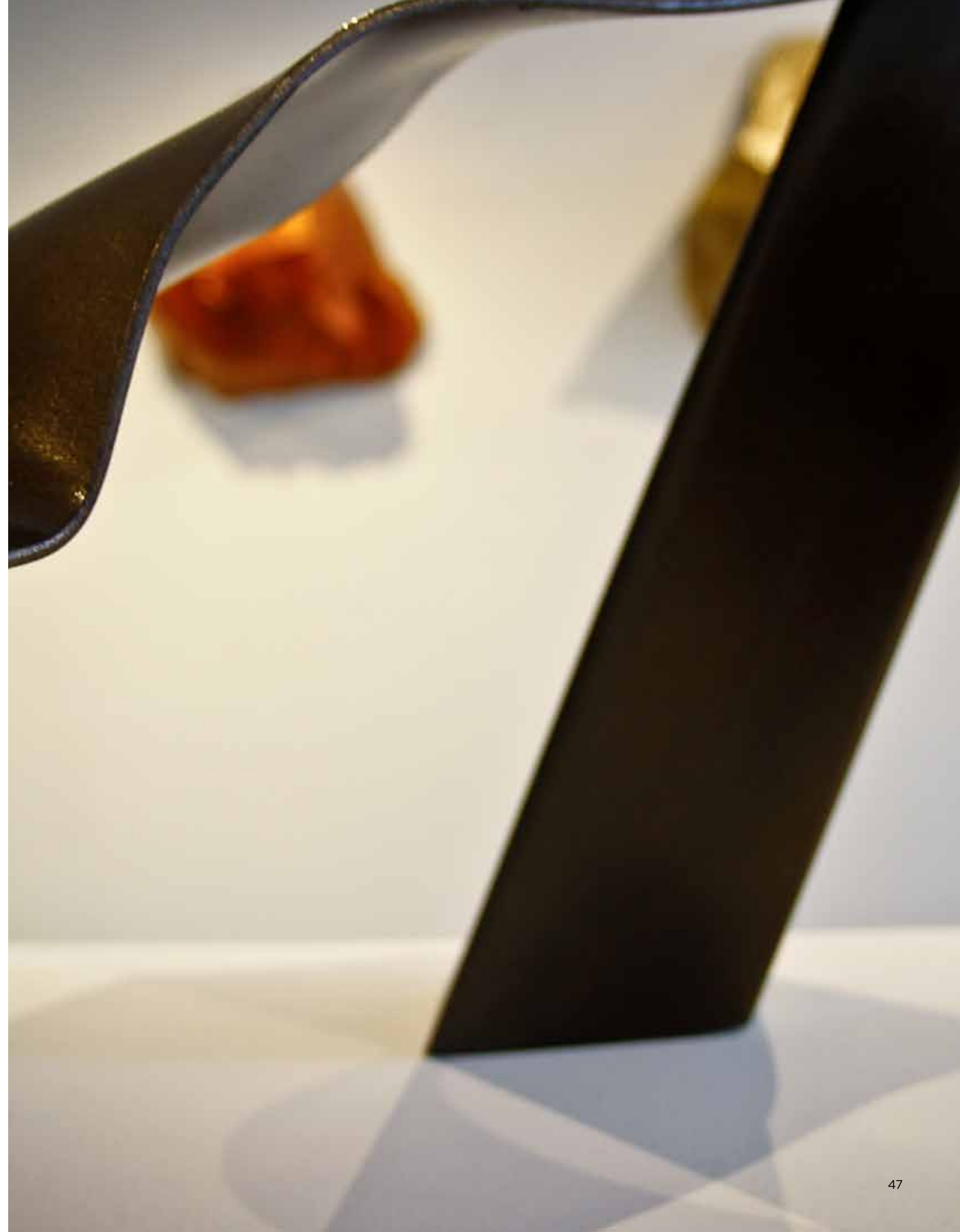


*Flashed Cube*, painted steel, 1977





Zorro, laquered steel, 1980







*Three Rock Relief*, painted resin, 2006





*So Many Years*, colored wood, 2012



*Petit Battement*, colored wood, 2012



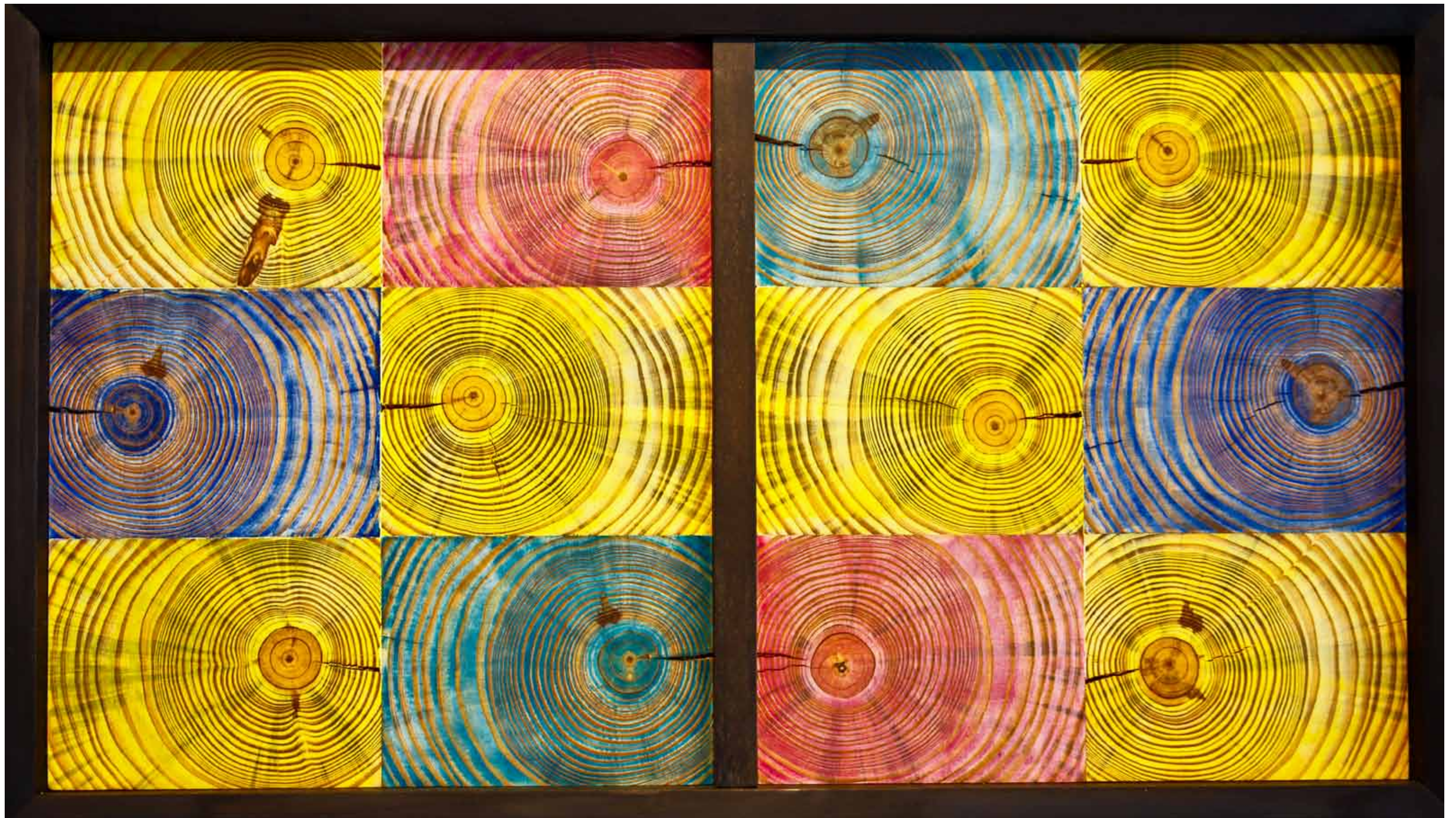


*Model of Ngozi*, medium density fiberboard, 2010



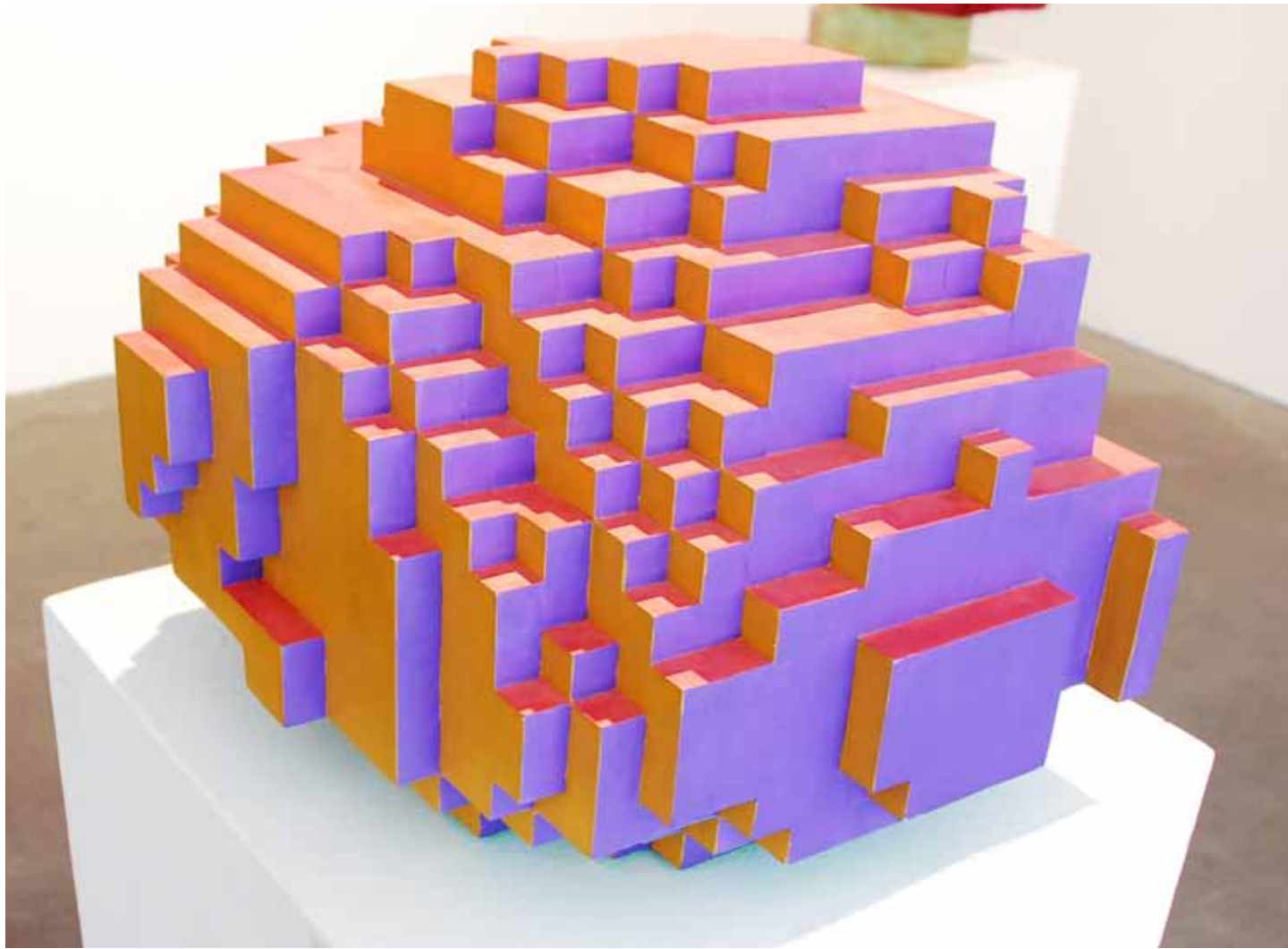
*Ngozi Companion*, medium density fiberboard, 2010



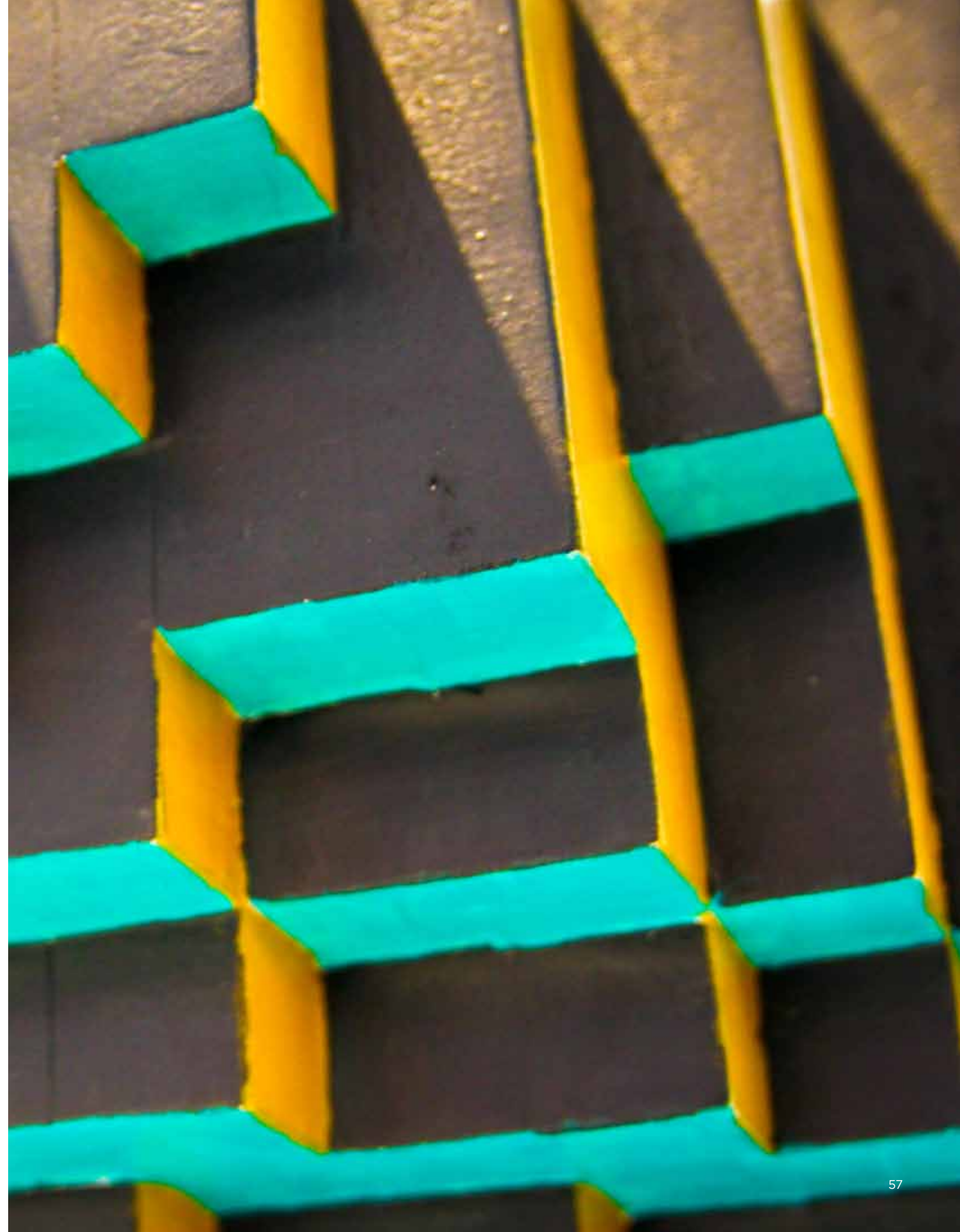


*Double Vision, colored wood, 2012*

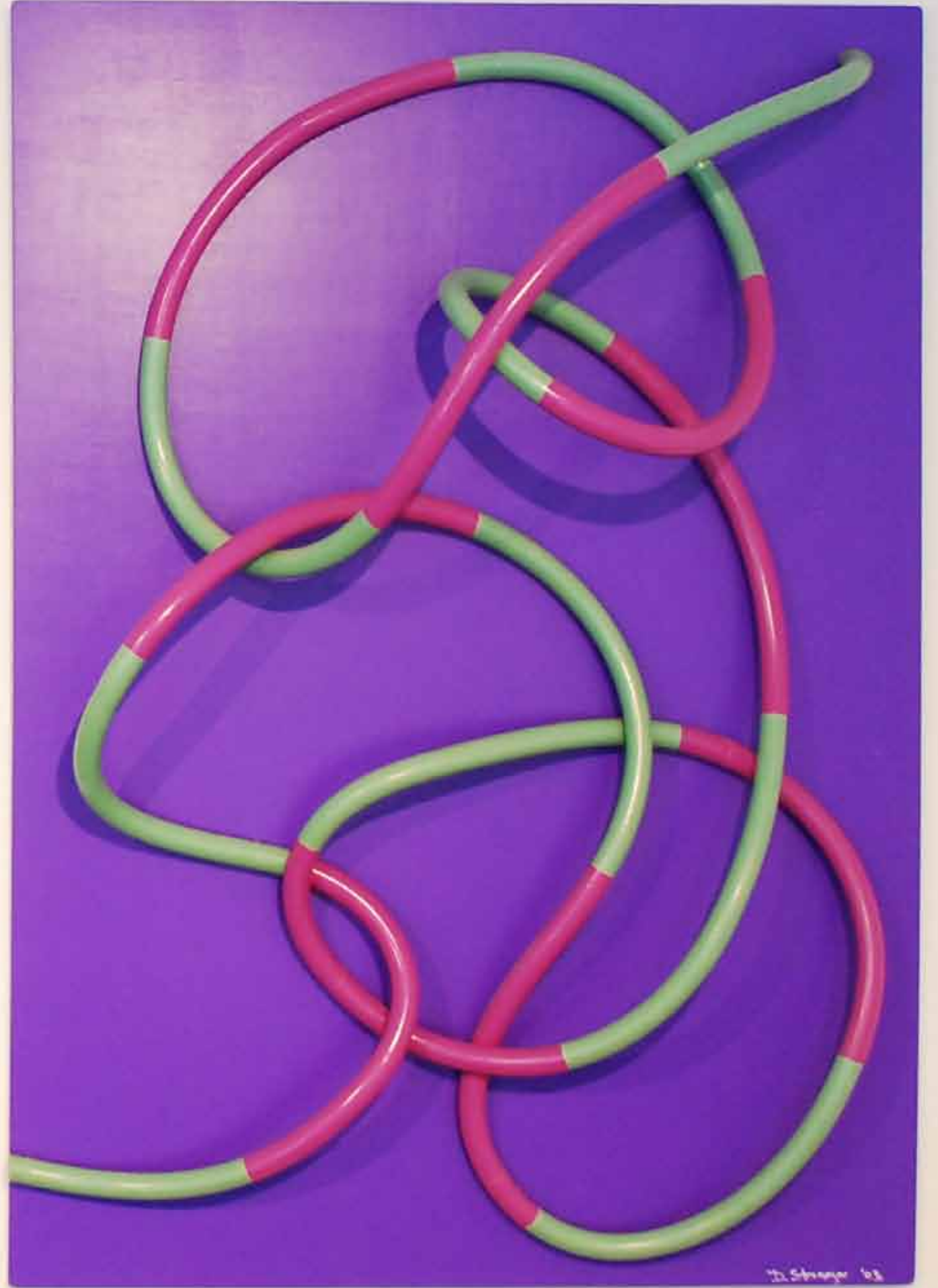




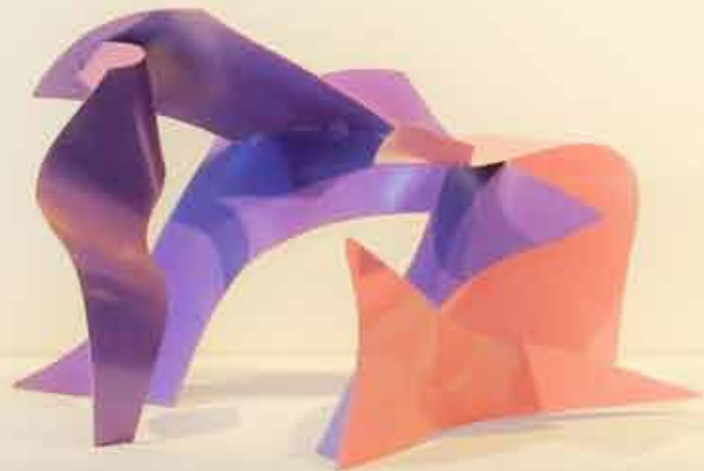
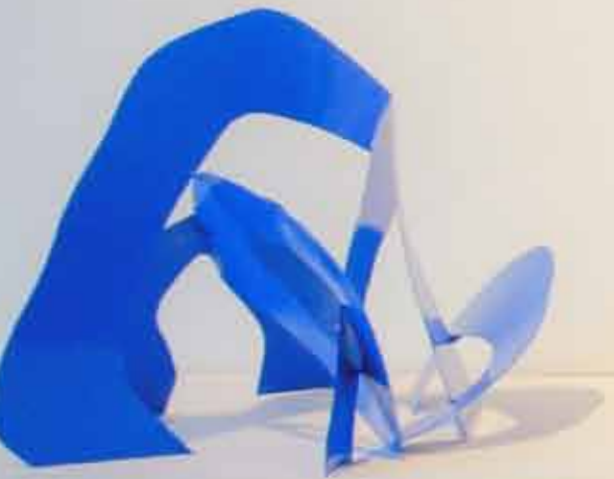
*Block Rock*, painted MDF, 2006











(L-R): *Model of Song for My Father*, painted steel, 1989; *Model of Carlsbad*, painted steel, 1987

(L-R): *Model of Taking Flight*, painted steel, 2010; *Model of Red Note*, painted steel, 1988/2005

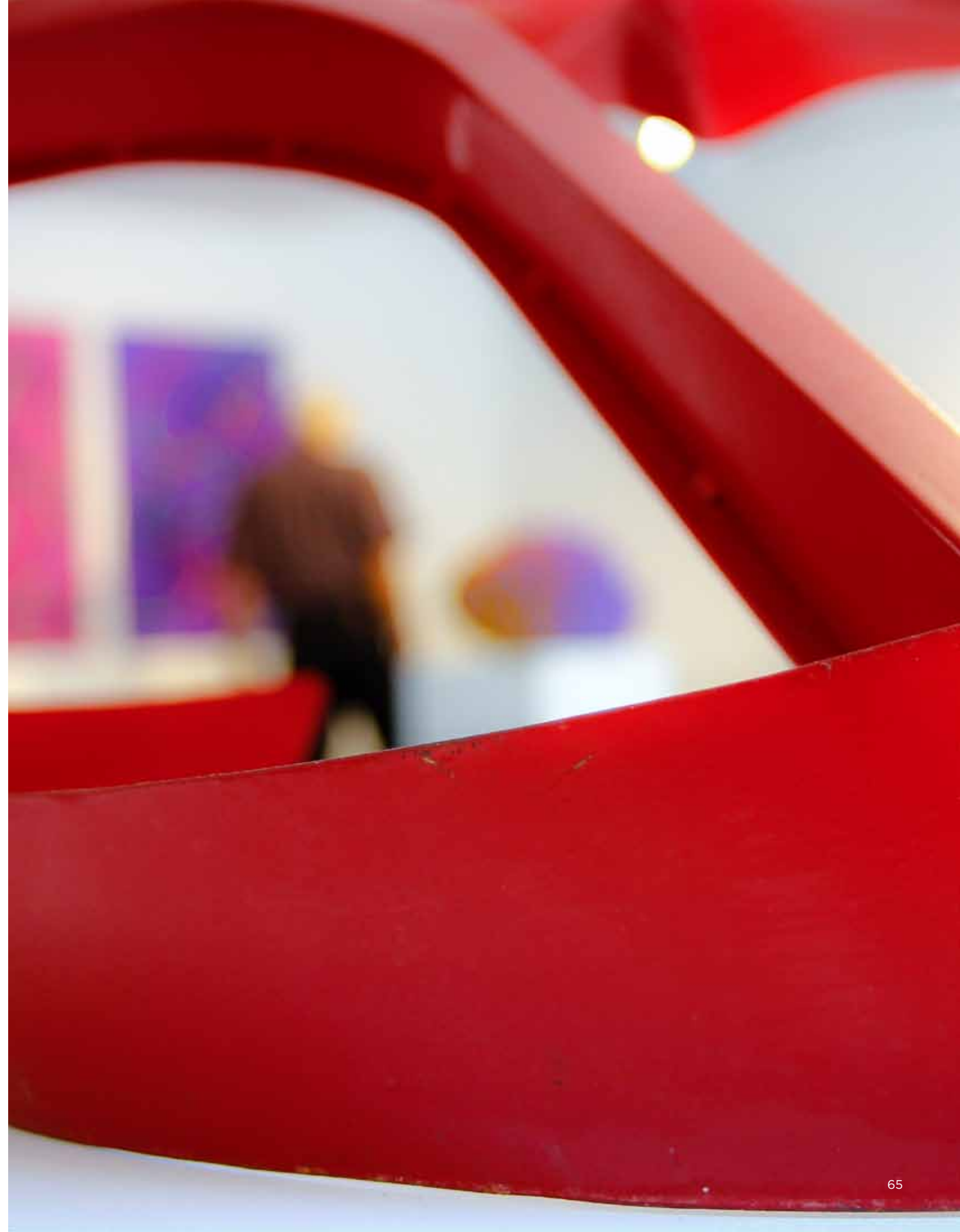








*Model of Cherry Float, painted steel, 1984*







(L-R): *Model of Slice Rock*, hardboard, 2004; *Model of Facetted Rock*, plaster, 2004; Actual Rock

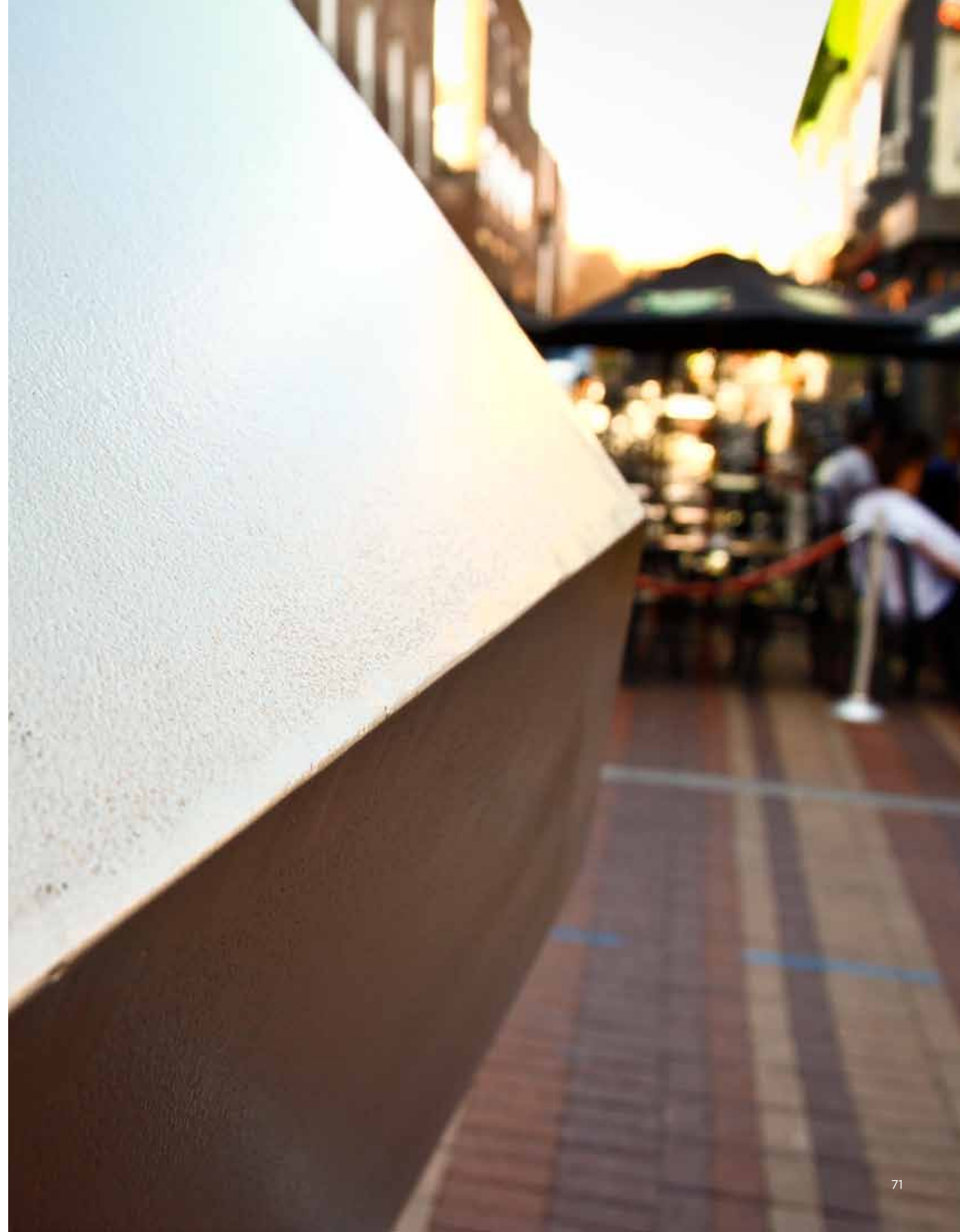








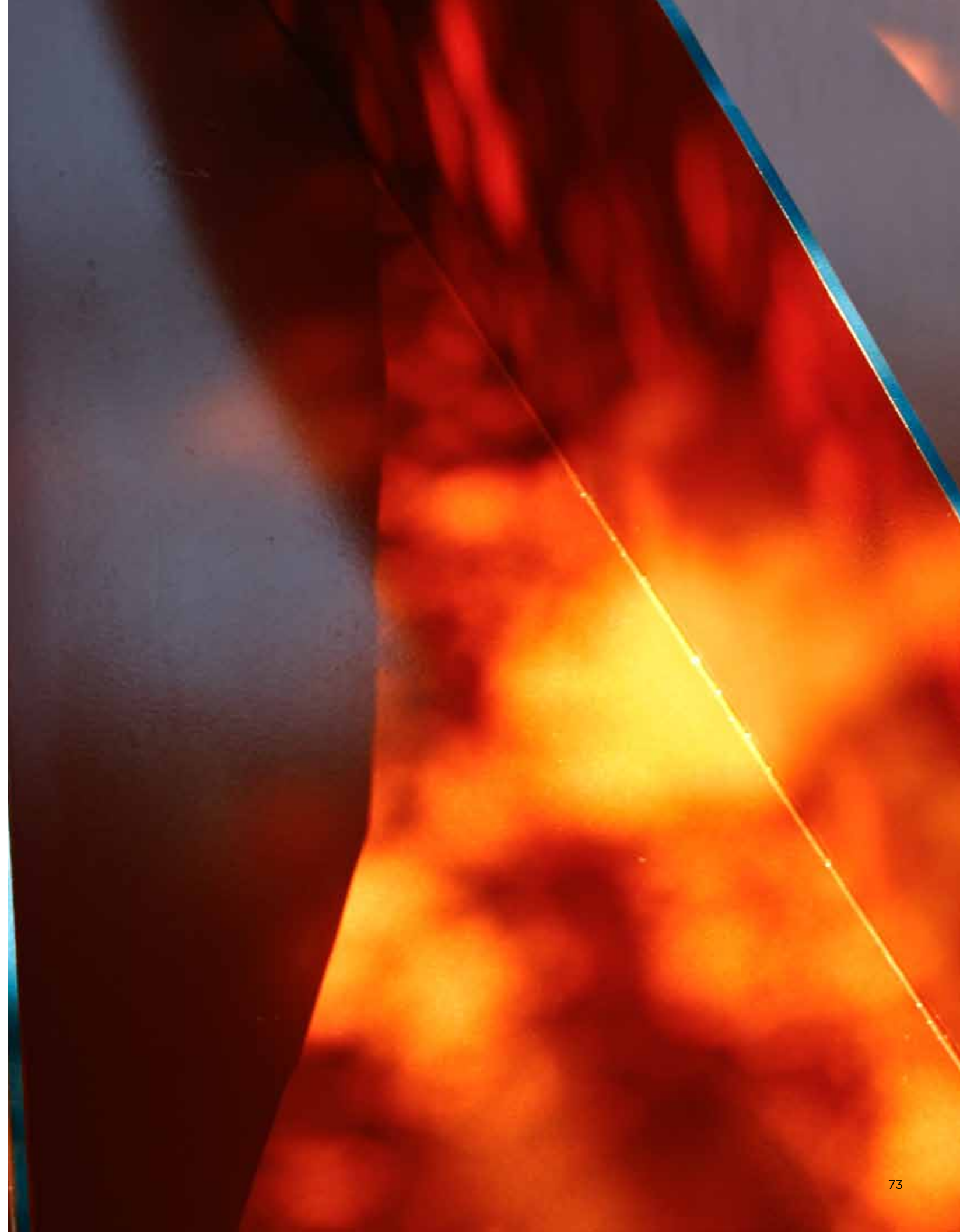
*Facetted Rock*, painted steel, 2004







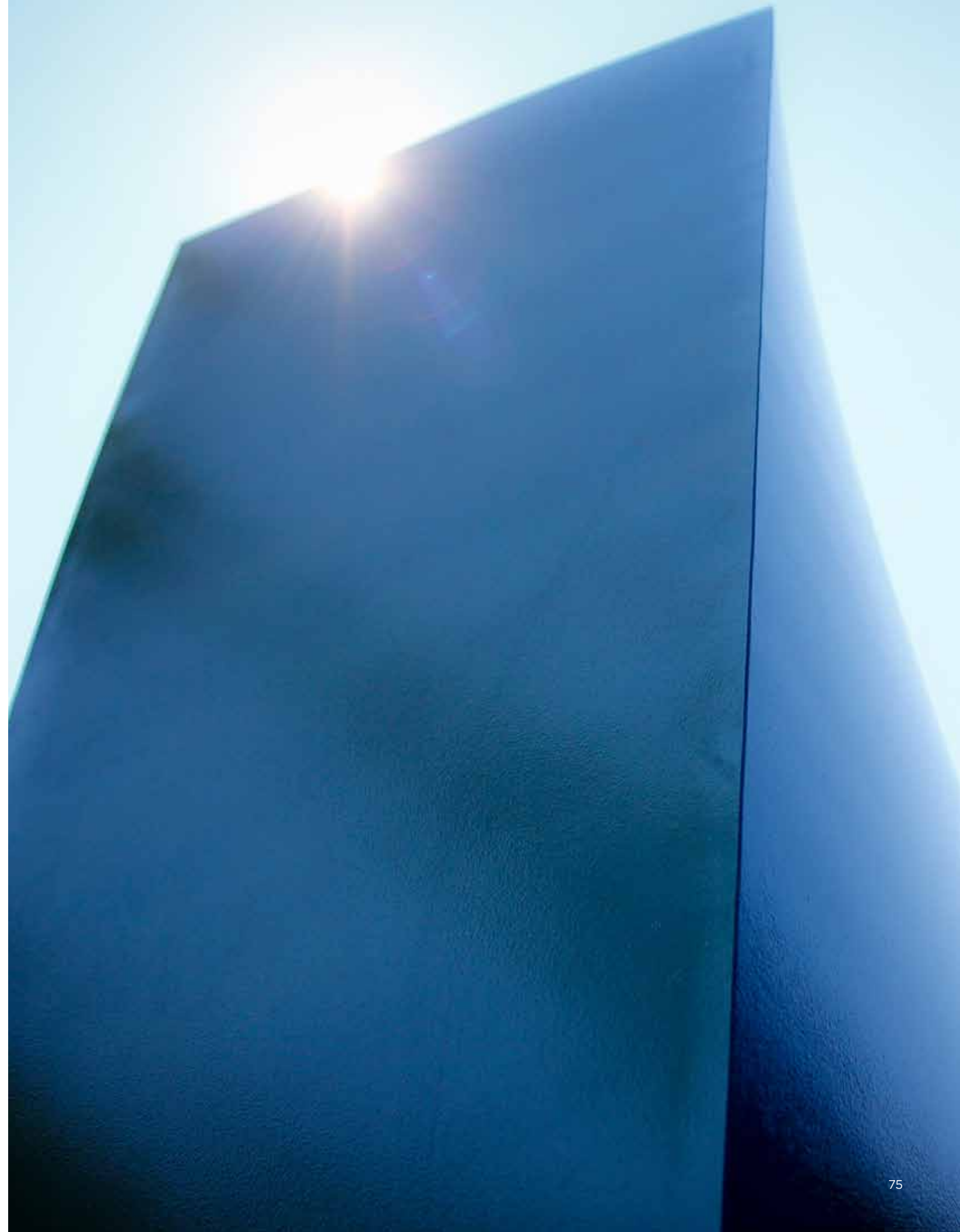
*Slice Rock*, painted steel, 2004







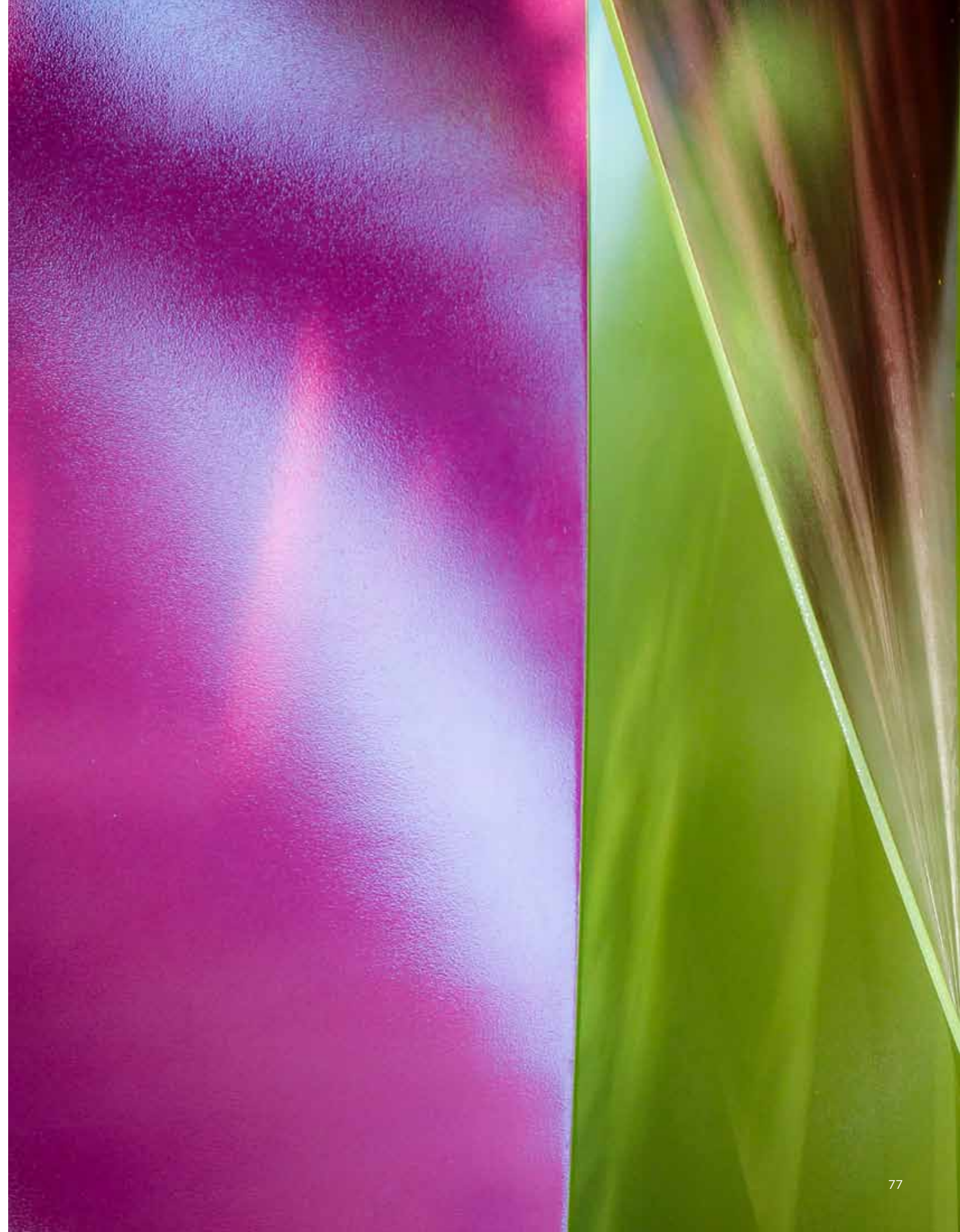
*Pasa Doble*, painted steel, 2012







*Rumba*, painted steel, 2012







*Plate Rock*, painted steel, 2004





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Quotes by the artist excerpted from an interview with Fran Stoddard, October, 2011.