

# 50X50

## FACE TO FACE



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2020

SAN JOSE MUSEUM OF ART





**50x50 Face to Face**



# **50x50 Face to Face**

contributor\_as\_it\_appears

SAN JOSÉ MUSEUM OF ART, SAN JOSÉ, CA

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# About

In celebration of its 50th anniversary, the San José Museum of Art (SJMA) is developing a digital publication titled *50X50: Face to Face*, highlighting fifty artists whose work has entered the permanent collection in the last fifty years. This digital publication will show the Museum's support of artists as visionary thinkers and help transform SJMA into a museum for the 21st century.

*50X50: Face to Face* will provide free worldwide access to a selection of multimedia materials that describe the lifelong work of SJMA's modern and contemporary artists. Documentation of artworks, exhibitions, and studios will engage readers in their professional lives, as well as their everyday lives, their ideas, and their creative processes.

# **Introduction**



Director's Foreword

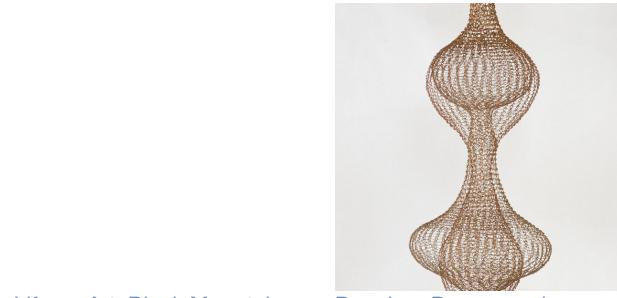
# An Essay by Sayre

# **Contributors**

# RUTH ASAWA: United States, 1926–2013



Learning to Crochet with  
Wire



Life as Art: Black Mountain  
College and Beyond



Japanese American  
Internment

*My teachers at Black Mountain College were practicing artists. . . . They taught me that there is no separation between studying, performing the daily chores of living, and creating one's own work. Through them I came to understand the total commitment required to be an artist.<sup>1</sup>*

1. Ruth Asawa, "Artist's Statement," in *Ruth Asawa: Completing the Circle*, ed. Philip E. Linhares (Oakland: Oakland Museum of California, 2002).

Ruth Asawa

## Learning to Crochet with Wire



Asawa works on a crocheted wire sculpture in her living room.

Ruth Asawa learned how to crochet with wire from basket makers in Toluca, Mexico, where in 1947 she traveled on summer break from Black Mountain College.<sup>1</sup> Upon her return, she began working with the material in a more abstract way, as a line that could interlock, interweave, and go anywhere in space: “You don’t think ahead of time, ‘this is what I want.’ You work on it as you go along. You make a line, a two-dimensional line, then you go into space, and you have a three-dimensional piece. It’s like a drawing in space.”<sup>2</sup> With the simple e-shaped crochet loop, she could draw and sculpt simultaneously. Asawa always began from the inside out, creating orbs that seem to float within larger spheres. The outside surface of the smaller sphere folds over to become the inside surface of the sphere around it so, like a line, there is continuity.

1. Paul J. Karlstrom, “Interview with Ruth Asawa and Albert Lanier Conducted for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution,” excerpted in *The Sculpture of Ruth Asawa: Contours in the Air*, ed. Daniell Cornell (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco; and Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 118.
2. Leah Ollman, “The Industrious Line,” *Art in America*, May 2007, 162.

# Life as Art: Black Mountain College and Beyond

Clip from Robert Snyder's film, *Ruth Asawa: Of Forms and Growth* © Masters & Masterworks Productions, Inc.

Ruth Asawa attended Black Mountain College in North Carolina from 1946 to 1949, studying with artist Josef Albers and architect Buckminster Fuller, whose lessons had a profound impact on her life work. At Black Mountain, teachers privileged problem solving and the process of making art as much as the final object.<sup>1</sup> The school's spirit of discipline, economy, and resourceful creativity echoed that of her upbringing during the Great Depression in Norwalk, California, a small agricultural town in Los Angeles County, where her family worked on a large-production vegetable farm. Albers instructed that all materials, no matter how common, have potential. Under his direction, her exercises in repetition, pattern, and form<sup>2</sup> on paper—her attention would soon turn from paper to copper and brass wire—taught her how to allow shape to emerge from a material rather than impose predetermined ideas upon it.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, Fuller's ideas about the connections between design and society and his commitment to addressing basic needs like shelter, as in his geodesic dome, instilled in Asawa a belief in the continuity of the self, art, and society.<sup>4</sup> With these integrated approaches to art making as a model, her practice would span from individual objects to public monuments to the Alvarado School Art Workshop—a community-based arts program Asawa started in 1968 in San Francisco public schools.

1. Karin Higa, "What Is an Asian American Woman Artist?" in *Art, Women, California 1950–2000: Parallels and Intersections*, ed. Diana Burgess Fuller and Daniela Salvioni (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 86.
2. Leah Ollman, "The Industrious Line," *Art in America*, May 2007, 161.
3. Robert Snyder, *Ruth Asawa: Of Forms and Growth*, produced and directed by Robert Snyder (Santa Barbara, CA: Masters & Masterworks, 1978), video, 28:00.
4. Leah Ollman, "The Industrious Line," *Art in America*, May 2007, 161.

Asawa 3A

# **Drawing, Dance, and Architecture**



Ruth Asawa, *Untitled (S.035, Hanging Six-Lobed, Multilayered Interlocking Continuous Form within a Form with Spheres in the Second, Fifth, and Sixth Lobes)*, from "Group of Architectural Works", c.1962 Collection of the San José Museum of Art. Gift of the Artist in honor of the San Jose Museum of Art's 35th Anniversary. Photograph by Johnna Arnold.



Ruth Asawa, *Untitled (S.035, Hanging Six-Lobed, Multilayered Interlocking Continuous Form within a Form with Spheres in the Second, Fifth, and Sixth Lobes)*, from "Group of Architectural Works", c.1962, detail Collection of the San José Museum of Art. Gift of the Artist in honor of the San Jose Museum of Art's 35th Anniversary. Photograph by Johnna Arnold.

Ruth Asawa's airy, hourglass-shaped sculptures appear to float in space, though they are suspended from the ceiling. Created during the 1950s and 60s, these lobe sculptures made of crocheted wire, like *Untitled (S.035, Hanging Six-Lobed, Multilayered Interlocking Continuous Form within a Form with Spheres in the Second, Fifth, and Sixth [Lobes])*, from "Group of

*Architectural Works*" (c. 1962), defy categorization. They evoke traditional craft, like weaving and basketmaking, but their nonutilitarian forms demonstrate an interest in abstraction; their play with positive and negative space suggest both volume and weightlessness; and their attention to line, particularly evident in the shadows they cast, approaches drawing. The biomorphic forms and dimensionality of Asawa's sculptures can be understood through the influence of both dance and architecture at Black Mountain College, where Asawa took classes with choreographer Merce Cunningham<sup>1</sup> and met her husband Albert Lanier, who was studying architecture. Though nonfigurative, the artist's long lobe installations recall the proportions of the body and the built environment. While made up of a stable, rigid structure, their wavy and intertwining shapes are "vaguely anthropomorphic [in the] way they hold space, each one acting as an analogue for a human body."<sup>2</sup>

1. Jennifer Gross, "Ruth Asawa: Dancers," in *Leap Before You Look: Black Mountain College, 1933–1957* ed. Helen Molesworth (Boston: Institute of Contemporary Art, 2015), 366.
2. Helen Molesworth, "Imaginary Landscape," in *Leap Before You Look: Black Mountain College, 1933–1957*, ed. Helen Molesworth (Boston: Institute of Contemporary Art, 2015), 25.

Asawa 5D

## Japanese American Internment



More than 200 people gathered on March 5, 1994 to see the unveiling and dedication of Asawa's memorial. Ruth Asawa Papers, M1585: Box X, Folder Y. Courtesy of the Department of Special Collections, Stanford Libraries. Artwork © Estate of Ruth Asawa. Photo: Fay Royal Baxter

Ruth Asawa was active in arts education and civic arts initiatives throughout her career, making several prominent public art pieces including the Japanese American Internment Memorial (1985–94) in San José. Asawa, with her family, had been interned in 1942 at a camp in Rohwer, Arkansas.<sup>1</sup> She designed a narrative monument with figurative imagery to depict the history of the Japanese-American community in California before internment—stories of immigration, agriculture, small business, and culture—as well as experiences in the camps.<sup>2</sup> On each end of the monument, pictorial scenes are framed by symbolic *mon*, or family crests that Asawa collected from 177 Japanese-American families in San José. Cast in two large bronze panels, it stands as a five-by-fourteen-foot double-sided monument in front of the Federal Building in downtown San José.

1. Philip E. Linhares, *Ruth Asawa: Completing the Circle* (Oakland: Oakland Museum of California, 2002).
2. Ruth Asawa, "Preliminary Design Concept," March 1990, in *Ruth Asawa Papers*, M1585, Box 122, Folder 3, Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, CA.

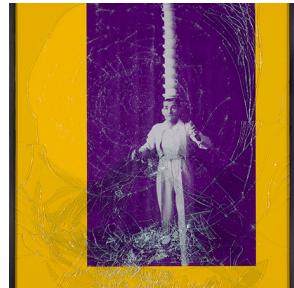
# BARBARA BLOOM: United States, b. 1951



Portrait of Barbara Bloom



Esprit de l'Escalier



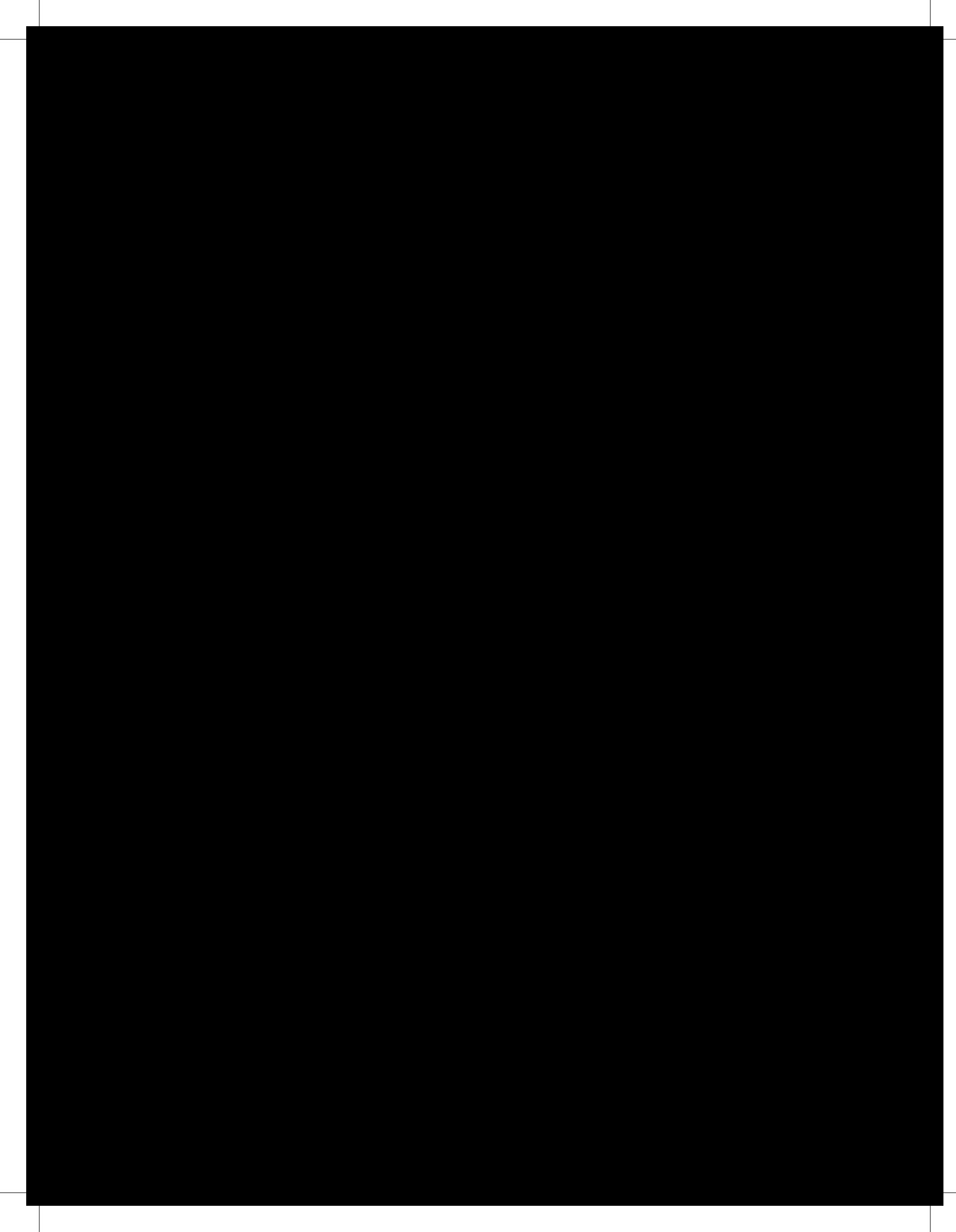
Balance No. 1 (Purple Head Stack) from the series Broken

A Philosophical Practice

*I'm attracted to the enormous, important matters of life that take place on a small, everyday scale. . . . I want making art objects to be closer to giving gifts. . . . I want to make a piece that is so subtle that there's an intimacy for the person who sees it, they will feel that I'm doing it just for them.<sup>1</sup>*

1. Barbara Bloom, interview with Kiki Smith, "Barbara Bloom," *BOMB*, no. 54 (Winter 1996): 38.





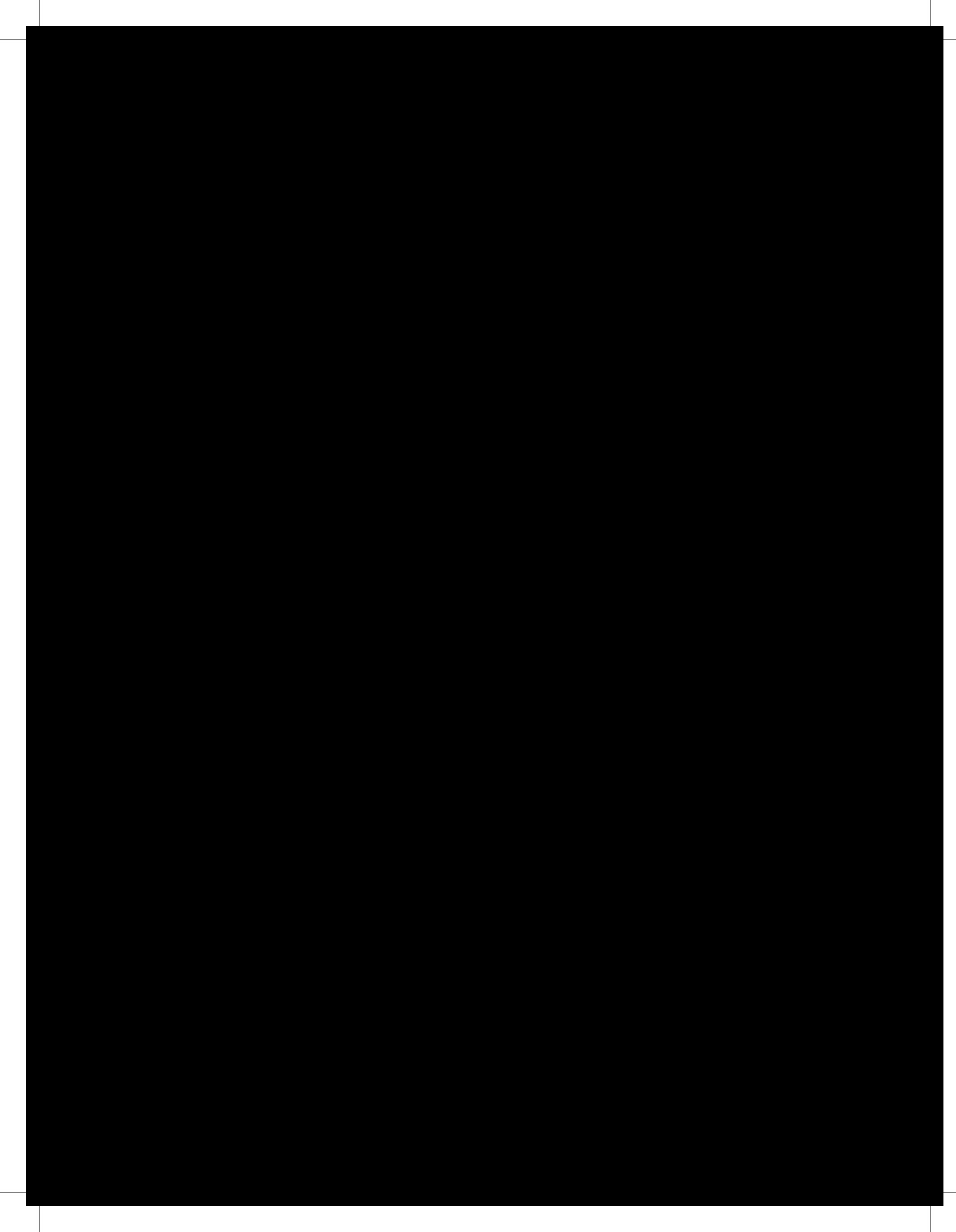
## Bloom Banner. Portrait of Barbara Bloom

Growing up in Los Angeles, conceptual artist Barbara Bloom loved when her parents drove by the “Open 24 hours, When It’s Tomorrow, It’s Today” sign at Denny’s restaurant.<sup>1</sup> Even as a young girl, Bloom was drawn to this casual folding of space and time, a philosophy embodied in her quiet, or unassuming, yet intricately designed installation practice that builds fictive worlds within worlds within worlds. The artist describes her often domestic-feeling interior spaces “like a movie set,”<sup>2</sup> in which objects with assorted histories and styles evoke specific anecdotes. However, she teases out their eccentricities and poetry to build layered

meaning. Bloom never tells a complete or straightforward story. Rather, her works imply potential narratives to be completed by the viewer.

1. Barbara Bloom, in a discussion with Simon Critchley, Robert Storr, and Joerg Heiser, “Scenes from a Marriage: Have Art and Theory Drifted Apart?,” *Frieze Talks*, Frieze Art Fair, London, October 16, 2009, audio, 1:28:15, <https://frieze.com/fair-programme/listen-scenes-marriage>.
2. Margot Mifflin, “Barbara Bloom,” *ARTnews* 92 (February 1993): 103.





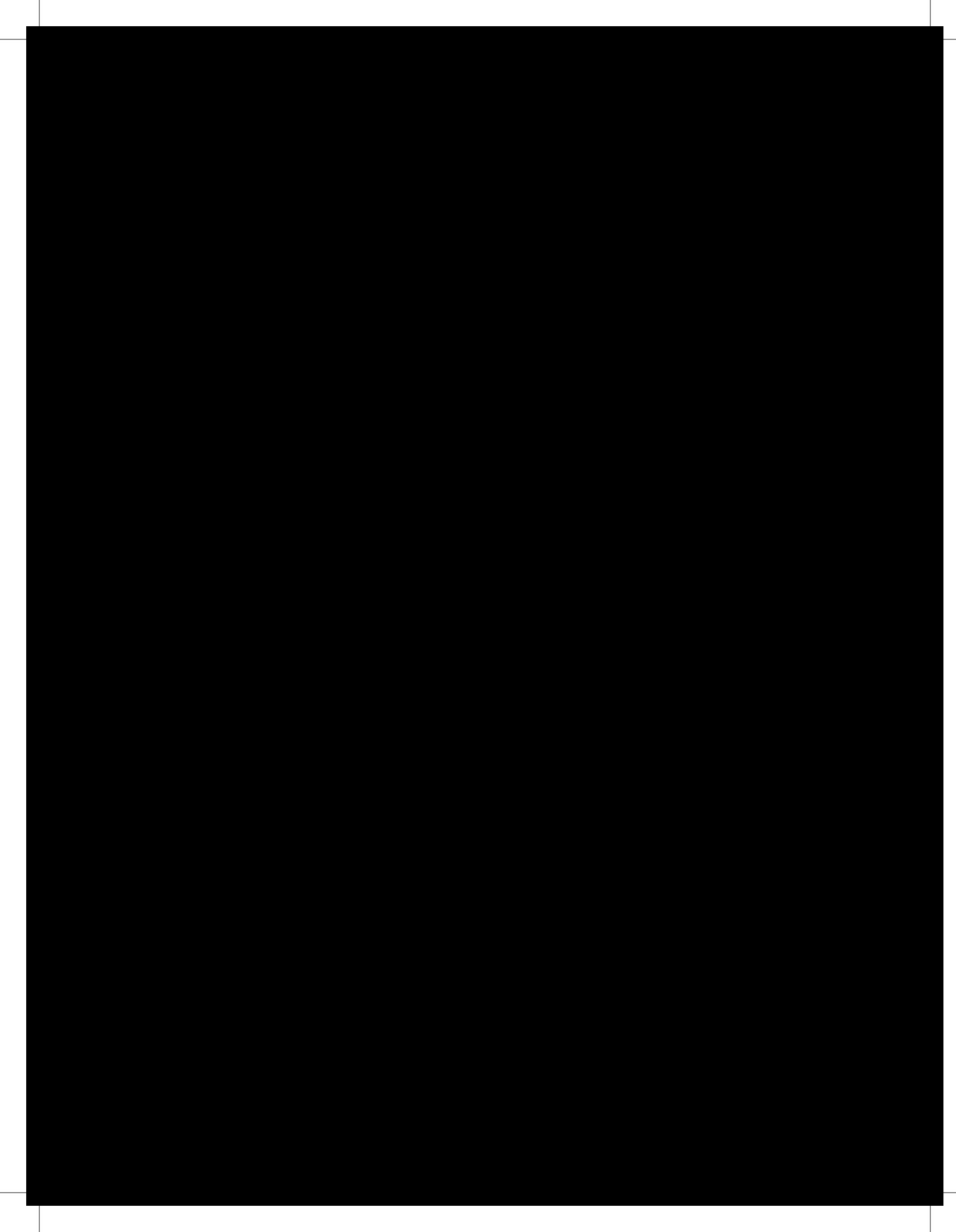
## Bloom 3B. Esprit de l'Escalier

Esprit de l'escalier, which literally translates to “spirit of the stairs,” describes the moment when you realize what you should have said too late—you’ve left and are halfway down the stairs. Borrowing this expression for the title, Barbara Bloom’s 1988 installation captures a sense of the unknown. The end is visible from the entrance of its four successive rooms, but their enigmatic contents, framed and reframed as one moves through the spaces, suggest the limits of visibility.<sup>1</sup> Framed Braille texts and words too small to read hang on the walls; a saucer-shaped dish holds a hologram of a pearl; a table setting with six porcelain plates is decorated with images of a Victorian séance; barely visible watermarks on sheets

of backlit paper depict UFO sightings; and an eerie circle of white hats levitate in a blue room. Examining the relationship between perception, sensation, and physical experience, Bloom’s work questions the idea that seeing is believing.<sup>2</sup> Her installation is a kind of innuendo, one in which the framework is clear but the content is obscure, inviting us to fill in the blanks—perhaps on the way down the stairs.

1. Susan Tallman, *The Collections of Barbara Bloom* (New York: International Center for Photography, 2007), 158–59.
2. Lindsey M. Wylie, “Barbara Bloom,” in *Selections: The San Jose Museum of Art Permanent Collection*, ed. Susan Landauer (San Jose, CA: San Jose Museum of Art, 2004), 36.





## Bloom 4B. Balance No. 1 (Purple Head Stack) from the series Broken

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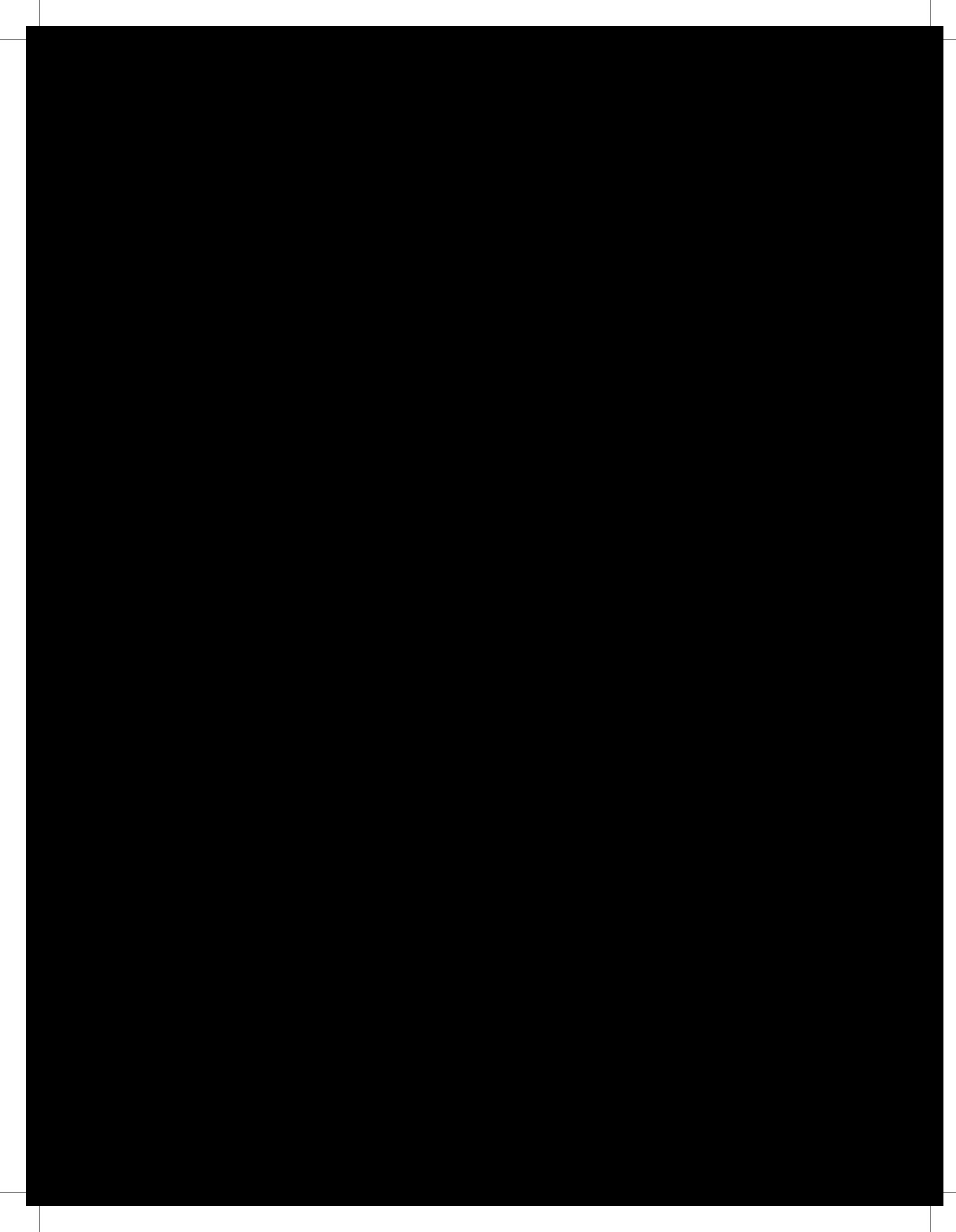
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Barbara Bloom is drawn to fragile materials like glass and porcelain. Their breakability implies absence.<sup>1</sup> They are temporal and melancholic, reminding us of our own mortality. After the artist fell out of a third-story window in 1995 and broke many bones in her body, including her vertebrae, she became interested in the Japanese tradition of repairing broken ceramics with gold lacquer. Known as *kintsugi*, this technique highlights an object's history and flaws rather than concealing its scars.<sup>2</sup> Anchored in this practice, Bloom developed a deeply personal series called *Broken* (2001) of purposefully broken and repaired ceramics

and photographic works, including X-ray images of the repaired pots, paper gift boxes printed with X-ray images of the artist's reconstructed vertebrae, and a found photograph of an acrobat balancing a stack of teapots—the precarious image framed under a sheet of shattered glass.

1. Barbara Bloom, interview with Kiki Smith, "Barbara Bloom," *BOMB*, no. 54 (Winter 1996): 38.
2. Susan Tallman, *The Collections of Barbara Bloom* (New York: International Center for Photography, 2007), 184–85.



<https://vimeo.com/284543777>

## Bloom 4A. A Philosophical Practice

Barbara Bloom finds inspiration for her conceptual practice in ordinary things. She is a collector of household objects, attuned to the often hidden or unseen meanings embedded within visual culture. Her installation *The Bedroom* (2017), for example, began at a flea market in Paris where she discovered a set of handpainted watercolors of domestic interiors from the 1960s with colorings and décor so opulent that they struck her as ridiculous. Upon removing the frame and

mat of one, she was intrigued to discover that the margin of the paper was dense with exploratory brushwork. The juxtaposition of the expressive gesture and tight, even fussy, decorative interior can be seen in the carpet Bloom custom designed for *The Bedroom*. Bloom likes the double entendre inherent to objects with both utilitarian and decorative values, like carpet, which slip between the usable and ornamental, the everyday and high art.

# TIM HAWKINSON: United States, b. 1960



The Mad Scientist, the  
Tinkerer

Circuits and Sounds



The Strangeness of Bodies



Using His Own Body

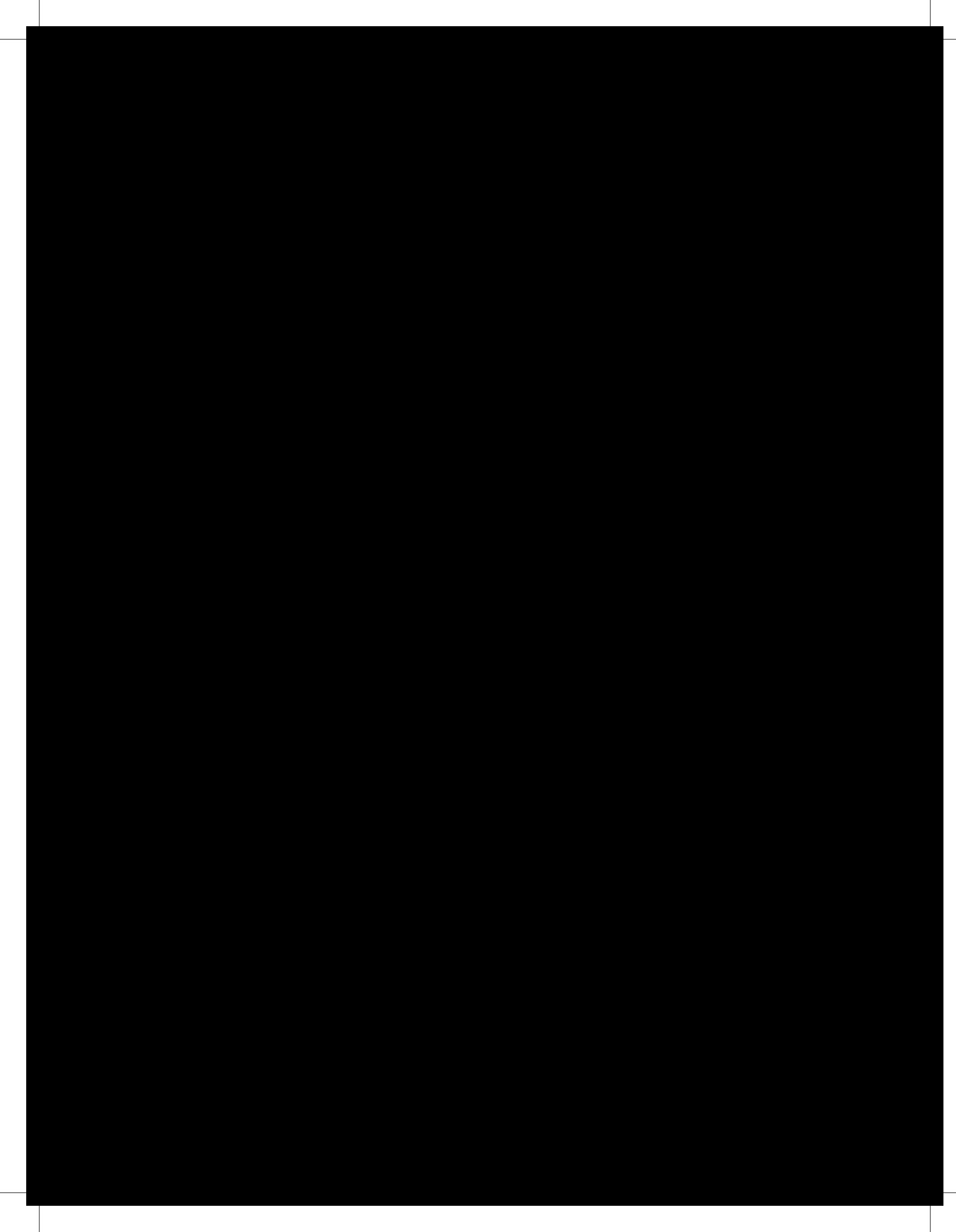
*I use my image or my body in a lot of the work as a jumping-off point. But usually the end result is so abstracted that I don't really feel so identified with it any longer. It's not about my identity . . . it's about our identity and our experiences within our bodies, and our bodies' relationship to the external world.<sup>1</sup>*

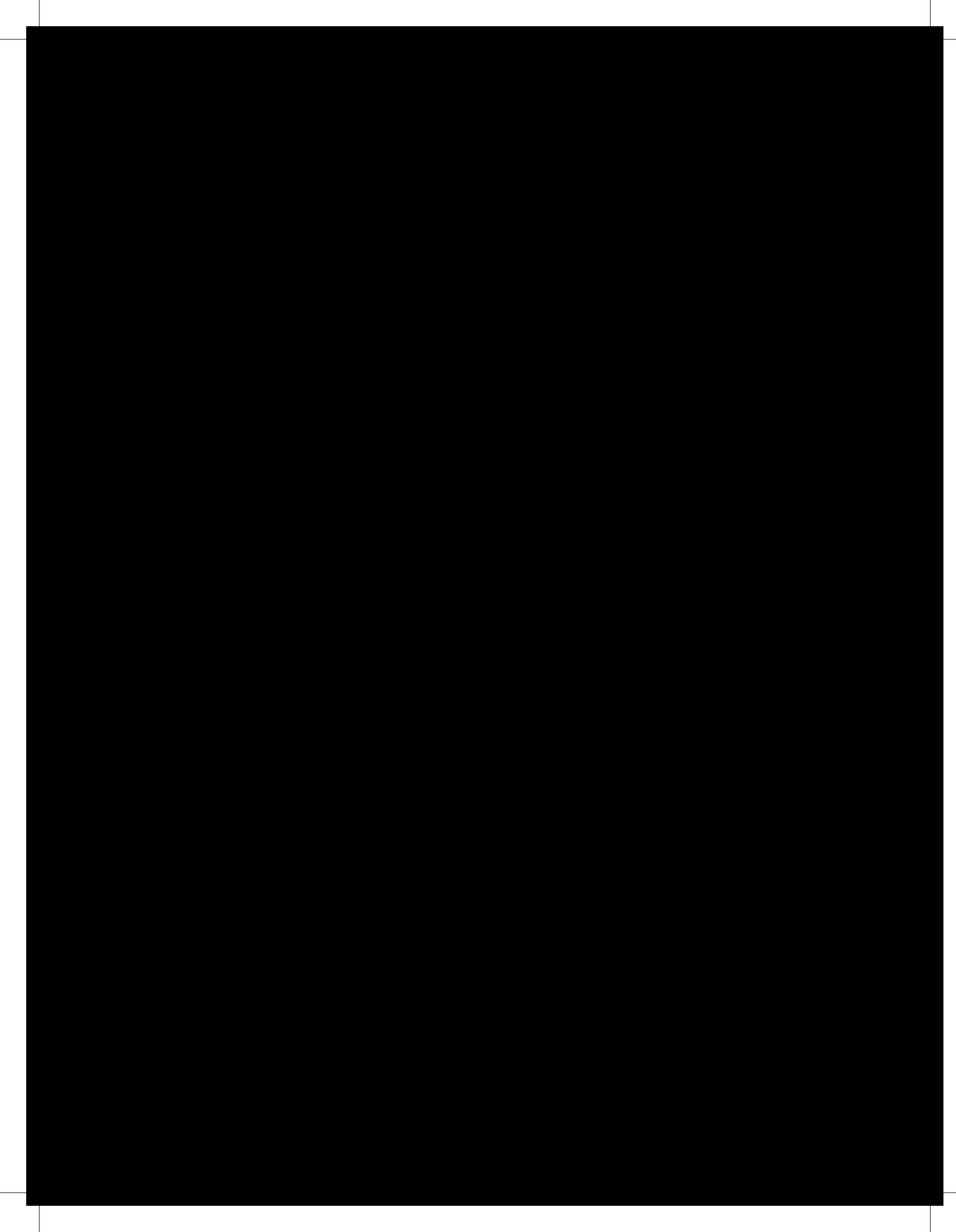
1. Tim Hawkinson, in "Time," season 2 of *ART21: Art in the Twenty-First Century*, PBS, New York, filmed 2003, video, 13:14, available at <https://art21.org/watch/art-in-the-twenty-first-century/s2/tim-hawkinson-in-time-segment>.

## Hawkinson Banner. The Mad Scientist, the Tinkerer

Drawings, paintings, sculpture, video, and sound make up Tim Hawkinson's unconventional and wide-ranging practice. Working primarily with imagery of the body and mechanical devices, the artist explores themes of corporeality, spirituality, and mortality in diverse works such as skeletal ink impressions of his own body, timepieces, and *Signature* (1993), an automated machine that signs the artist's name. A kind of mad scientist or tinkerer,<sup>1</sup> Hawkinson explores the human form and machines by "converting and reconstituting commonplace things into objects of wonderment."<sup>2</sup> Drawn to found and reclaimed objects—the artist's parents owned an antique shop<sup>3</sup>—like eggshells, fingernails, feathers, or discarded cardboard, Hawkinson's materials lend themselves to the surreal quality of his work, in which "reality is broken down into pieces and then rebuilt."<sup>4</sup>

1. See Valerie Fletcher, *Tim Hawkinson* (Washington, DC: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, 2001), and Steve Erickson, "What's He Building in There?" in *Tim Hawkinson*, ed. Tim Nye (New York: Nyehaus and Foundation 20 21, 2007).
2. Howard N. Fox, "Speaking in Tongues: The Art of Tim Hawkinson," in *Tim Hawkinson*, ed. Lawrence Rinder (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art; and New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2005), 34.
3. Lawrence Rinder, "My Favorite Things," in *Tim Hawkinson*, ed. Lawrence Rinder (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art; and New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2005), 24.
4. Steve Erickson, "What's He Building in There?" in *Tim Hawkinson*, ed. Tim Nye (New York: Nyehaus and Foundation 20 21, 2007).





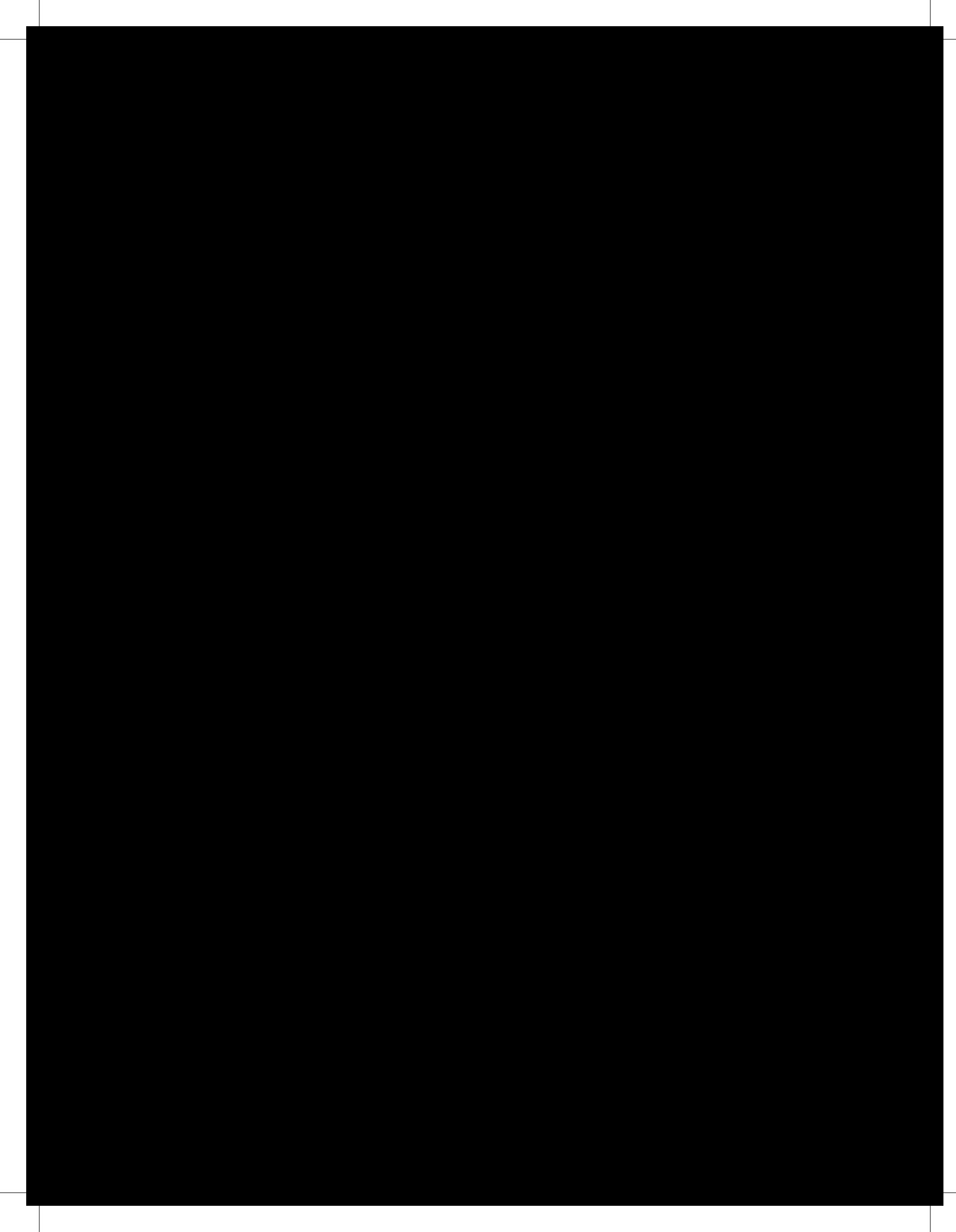
## Hawkinson 3A. Circuits and Sounds

Tim Hawkinson is a collector of musical instruments. While not a musician, he likes “that these little objects have a voice and can be manipulated.”<sup>1</sup> The artist’s best-known installation, *Überorgan* (2000), is a colossal music machine: a system of plastic bags, ducts, and pipes that inflates, bellowing to the score of a player piano. Forced air rushes through metal horn-shaped funnels and several miles of plastic sheeting that form large balloons and extensive tubes snaking through multiple rooms. Covering the square footage of a football field, it breathes and groans like a living

organism. The organ is at once an instrument and a gargantuan system of entrails. Hawkinson, who is interested in the logic of systems of both humans and machines, is drawn to “interference patterns—the way overlapping patterns can create another pattern or rhythm.”<sup>2</sup>

1. Tim Hawkinson, in “In the Studio: Tim Hawkinson with David Coggins,” *Art in America*, May 2009, 88.
2. Tim Hawkinson, in “In the Studio: Tim Hawkinson with David Coggins,” *Art in America*, May 2009, 88.



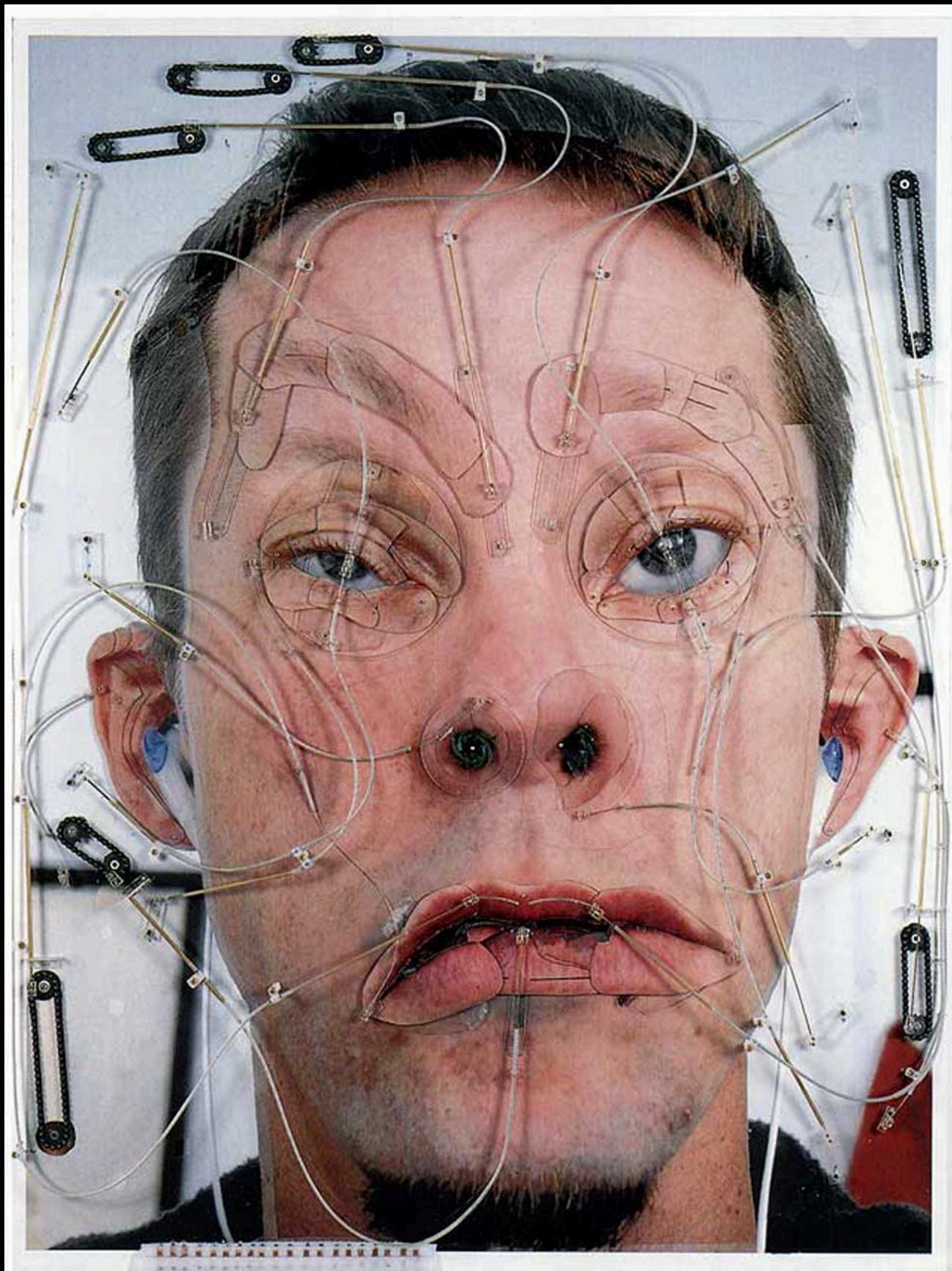


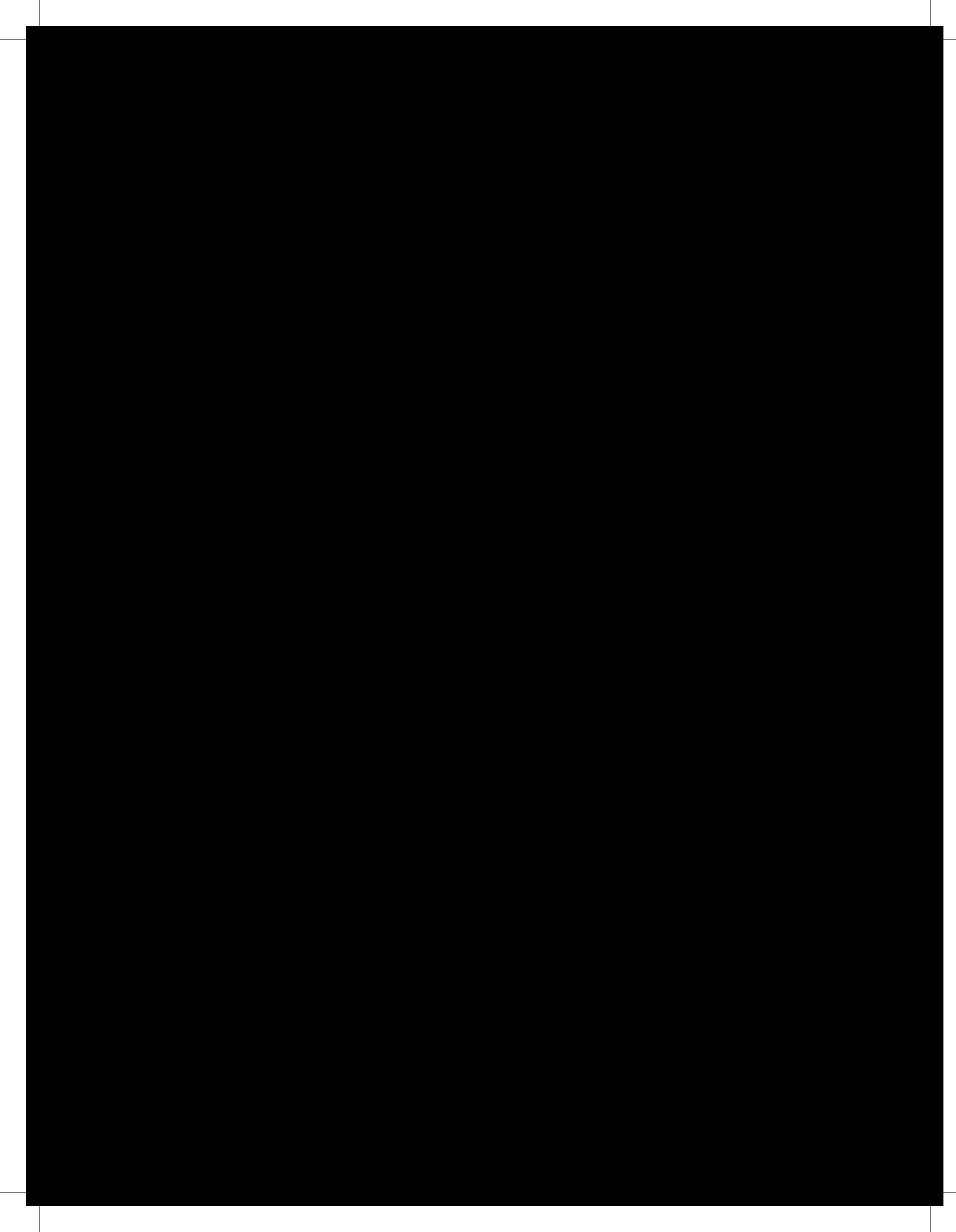
## Hawkinson 4A. The Strangeness of Bodies

The mind-body relationship—that distinctive network between our consciousness and our corporeal being—is at the center of Tim Hawkinson’s work.<sup>1</sup> *Scout* (2006–07), a *nearly six-foot-tall headless human figure, is a humorous and strange* portrait that proportionally registers the average brain’s attention to senses in different parts of the body, so the hands, feet, and genitals are disproportionately giant. Typical of Hawkinson’s eccentric aesthetic, *Scout*’s skin is made of cardboard boxes from the garment factory adjacent

to the artist’s Los Angeles studio, stitched together. A kind of Frankenstein monster made of everyday material, *Scout* reflects the nature of our being—a bodily map reflecting the human mind.

1. Lawrence Rinder, “My Favorite Things,” in *Tim Hawkinson*, ed. Lawrence Rinder (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art; and New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2005), 14–15.





## Hawkinson 5D. Using His Own Body

There is an economy to Tim Hawkinson's work. While his handmade, cobbled-together machines don't appear sleekly efficient, the artist's recycled materials and use of his own body as a source of investigation are notably utilitarian. In the motorized self-portrait *Emoter* (2000), a hydraulic mechanism that receives electronic signals from light sensors responding to broadcast programming on a nearby television screen to move loosely arranged fragments of a photograph of the artist's face.<sup>1</sup> As the artist states: "I can't make most of these faces myself. It's using my face because that's readily available, I have exclusive rights to my face . . . it seems just honest to use my own face. . . . Sometimes the manipulation is really slight, depending on what's coming through the TV channel. When there's a sporting event with lots of activity, the face can be pretty emotional."<sup>2</sup> While Hawkinson's body figures prominently in his work and even in his materials—

*Bird* (1997) is a two-inch-tall bird skeleton made of the artist's fingernail clippings—his examinations are not self-reflective introspection. Rather, they suggest a "sacramental energy," the employment "of himself *in extremis* to his work."<sup>3</sup>

1. Lawrence Rinder, "My Favorite Things," in *Tim Hawkinson*, ed. Lawrence Rinder (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art; and New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2005), 22–24.
2. Tim Hawkinson, in "Time," season 2 of *ART21: Art in the Twenty-First Century*, PBS, New York, filmed 2003, video, 13:14, available at <https://art21.org/watch/art-in-the-twenty-first-century/s2/tim-hawkinson-in-time-segment>.
3. Howard N. Fox, "Speaking in Tongues: The Art of Tim Hawkinson," in *Tim Hawkinson*, ed. Lawrence Rinder (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art; and New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2005), 40.

# TONY OURSLER: United States, b. 1957



Members of the Poetics



Video Projections No. 59

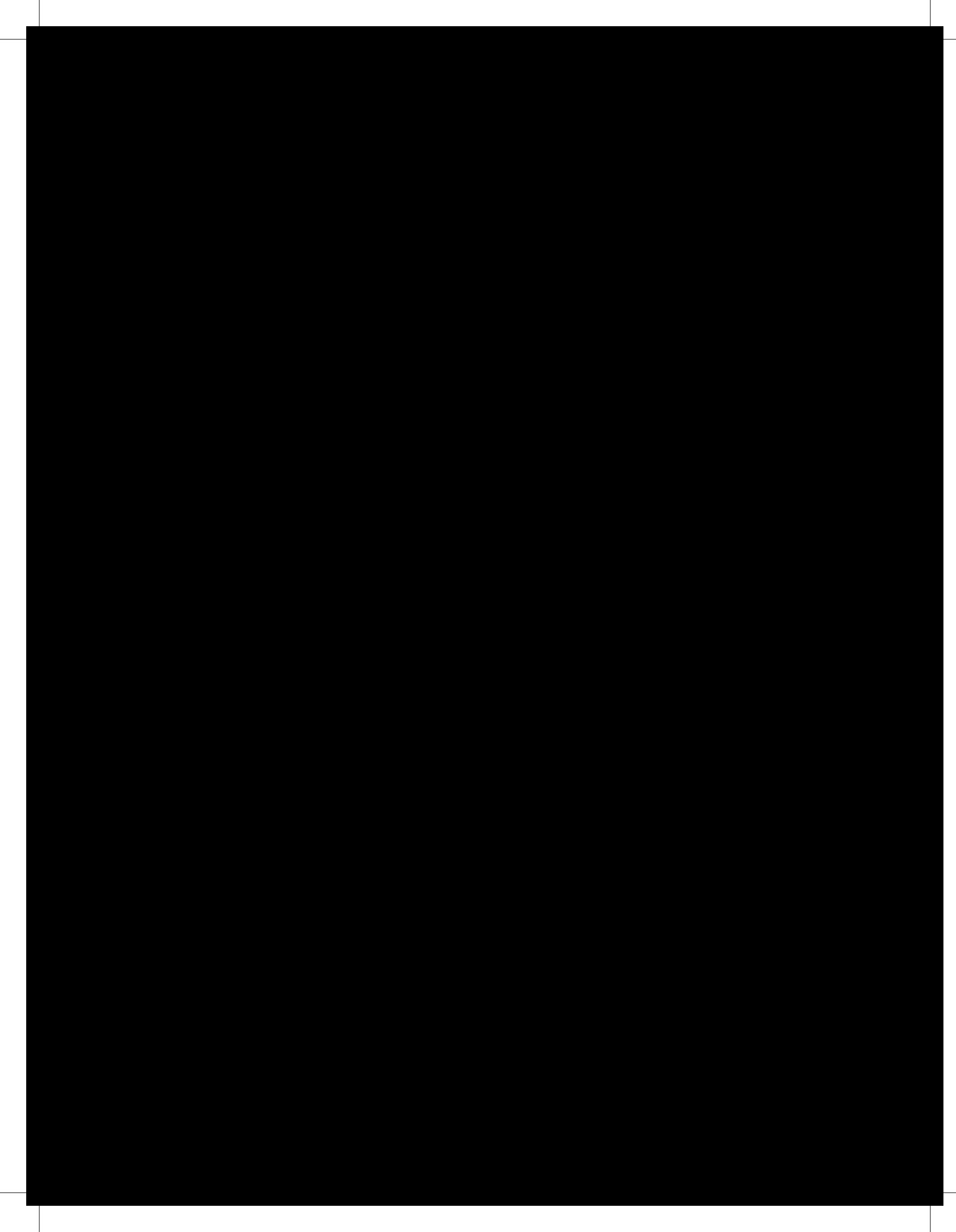


Slip

*The face has always been important in my work. The face is where language comes forth. It's the way we communicate. It's really the window into identity and empathy.<sup>1</sup>*

1. Tony Oursler, in "Who's Making It: Tony Oursler," *Gotham TV* segment, New York Metro TV, filmed 2001, video, 5:08, available at <http://tonyoursler.com/interviews>.



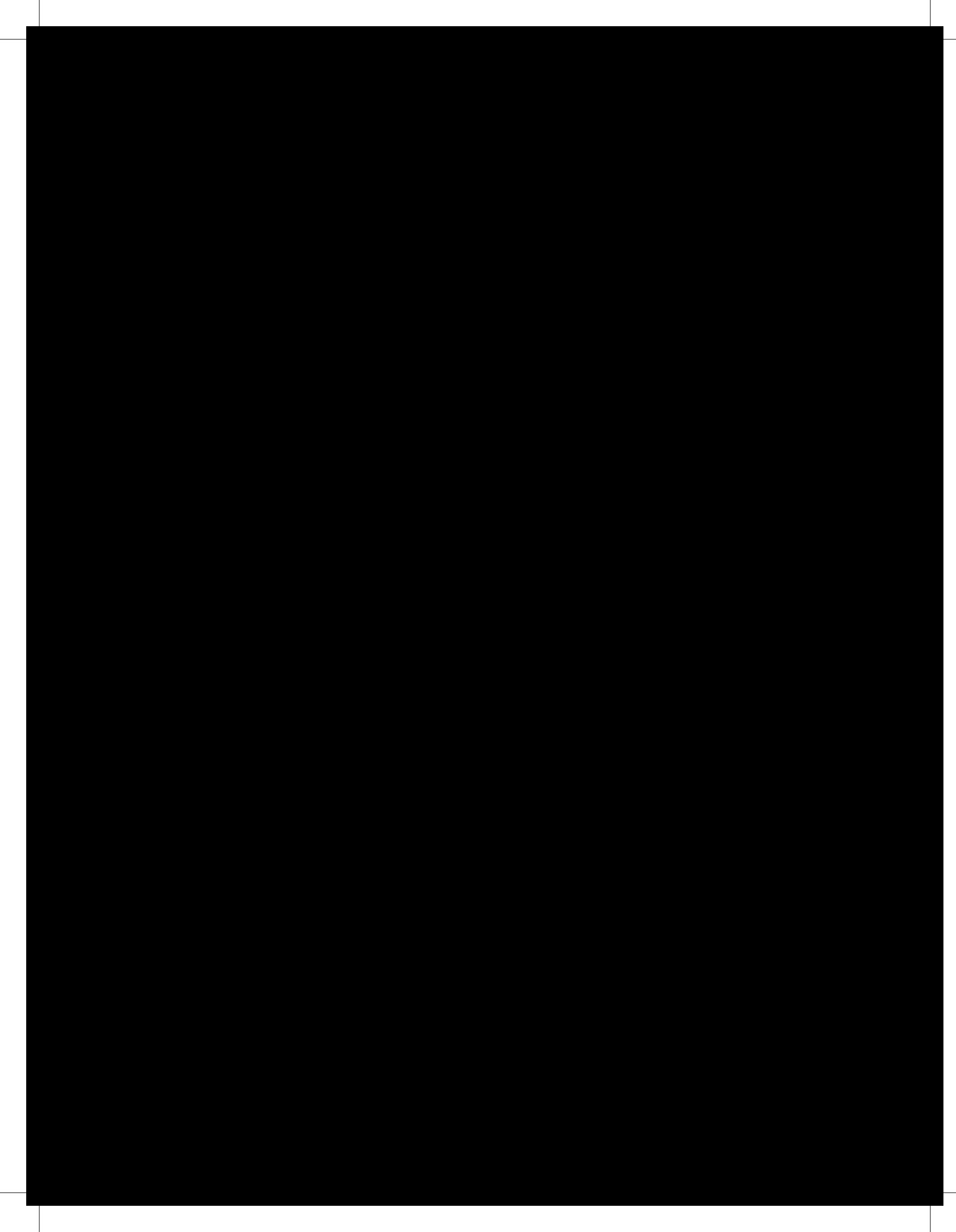


## Oursler Banner. Members of the Poetics

Tony Oursler began making experimental single-channel videos while studying at California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) in the late 1970s. He and a group of CalArts peers shared a “kaleidoscopic” approach to artmaking—a kind of interdisciplinary enterprise that encompasses music, text, images, sculpture, and performance.<sup>1</sup> For his videos, Oursler wrote scripts and constructed characters from modest and often strange found materials—like kitchen spoons, bits of toilet paper, or painted cardboard—animating them within handpainted sets. The school’s outmoded Sony Portapak video cameras yielded fuzzy images with

ghostly streaks that intrigued Oursler.<sup>2</sup> Amusing, disorienting, and with an intentionally low-budget aesthetic, his surreal videos challenge the seamless editing of Hollywood productions, which slickly dissolve the distinctions between reality and media image.

1. Tony Oursler, “Image of the People: Mike Kelley (1954–2012),” *Artforum* 50, no. 9 (May 2012): 330.
2. Michael Kimmelman, “A Sculptor of the Air with Video,” *New York Times*, April 27, 2001.



<https://vimeo.com/293660704>

## Oursler 3A. Video Projections No. 59

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<b>Location</b>	<a href="https://vimeo.com/293660704">https://vimeo.com/293660704</a>
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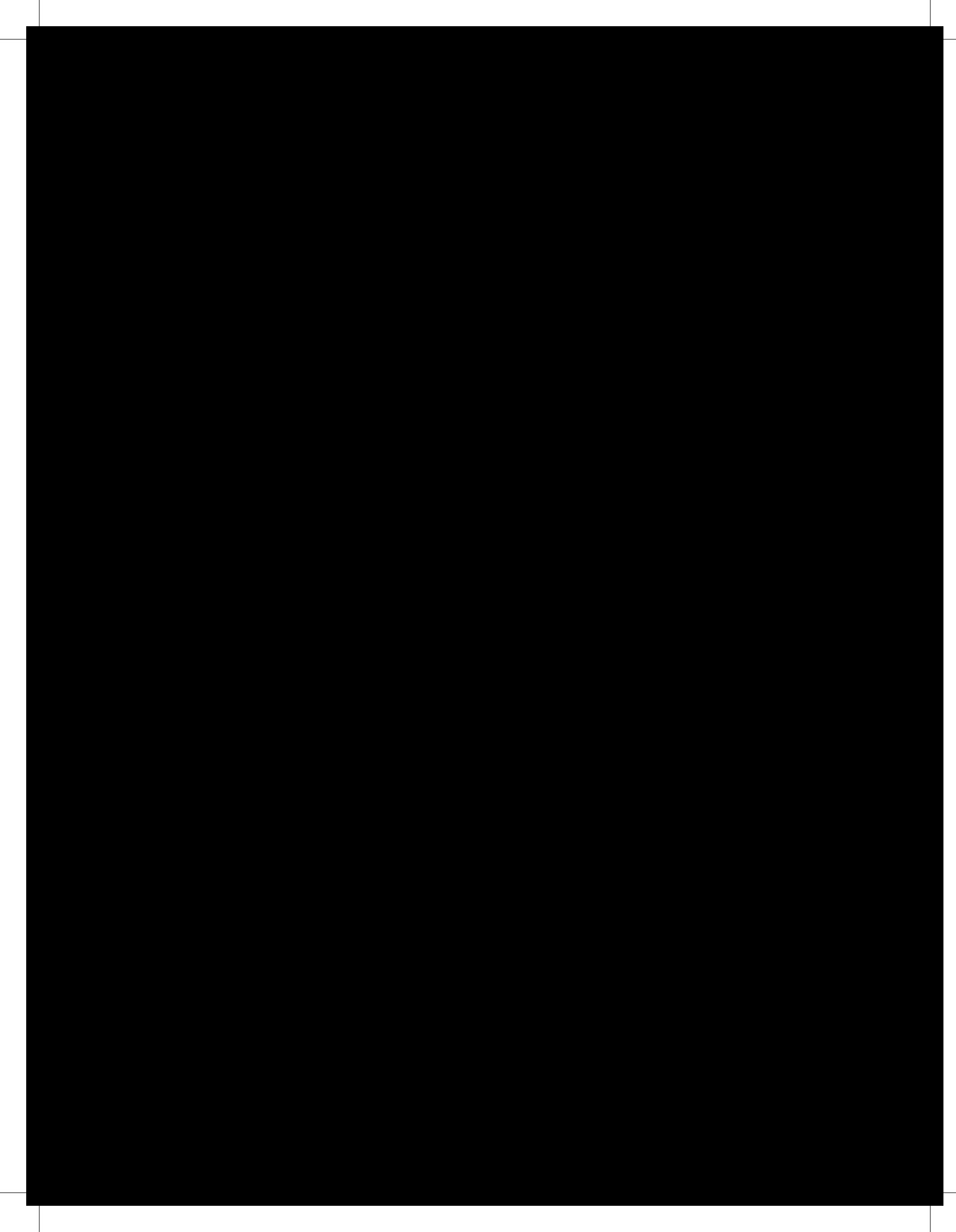
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Tony Oursler thinks of television and film like psychedelic drugs that induce a dream space, parallel to reality. Calling them “mimetic technology”<sup>1</sup>—a term he borrows from pharmacology to describe drugs that emulate human consciousness—he is interested in the way television, film, and media imagery mimic human thought to engender seemingly real emotions. Oursler came to this realization watching a lot of television as a teenager. Influenced by his magician grandfather Fulton Oursler, he developed an understanding of how

mimetic technology, through close approximation of reality, has the power to also alter our perception.<sup>2</sup>

1. Tony Oursler, in “Smoke and Mirrors: Tony Oursler’s Influence Machine: A Conversation Between Tony Oursler and Louise Neri,” in *Tony Oursler: The Influence Machine* (London: Artangel; and New York: Public Art Fund, 2000), 56.
2. Fred Nadis, “Of Linking Rings and Magic Lanterns: Tony Oursler’s Family Gothic,” in *Imponderable: The Archives of Tony Oursler* (Zurich: LUMA Foundation, 2015), 447–57.





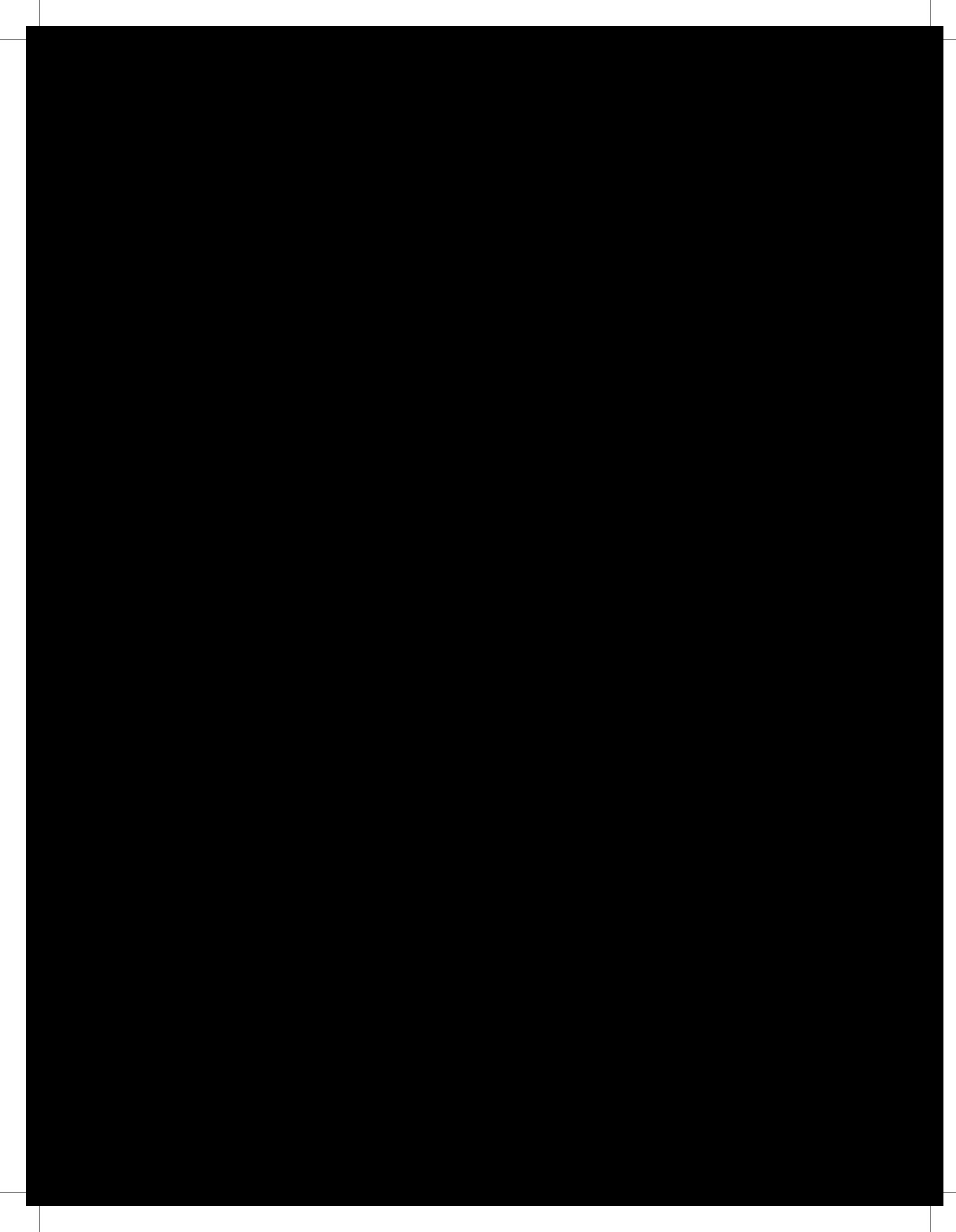
## Oursler 4A. The Influencer Machine

Faces and moving images are eerily projected into clouds of smoke and on trees and walls in Tony Oursler's multiple-projection outdoor installation *The Influence Machine* (2000). Light and the sounds of babbling voices materialize into sculpture. Known for his work projecting images through space onto various mediums—fiberglass armatures, paper, smoke—Oursler combines the intangible qualities of light with the physicality of material. In what he calls a “third space,”<sup>1</sup> Oursler—whose grandfather Fulton Oursler was an accomplished magician skilled in the trickery of spirit photography<sup>2</sup>—explores the hypnotic effects and subtle, even insidious, power of mediated imagery.

*The Influence Machine* takes its title from an early eighteenth-century invention, a spherical glass vacuum that had no practical use but emitted a mesmerizing green glow. This trance-inducing device was the precursor to the cathode ray tube used in early television technology.

1. Tony Oursler, in “TateShots: Tony Oursler Studio Visit,” filmed January 2011 at Tony Oursler’s studio, New York, video, 4:19, available at <http://tonyoursler.com/interviews>.
2. Fred Nadis, “Of Linking Rings and Magic Lanterns: Tony Oursler’s Family Gothic,” in *Imponderable: The Archives of Tony Oursler* (Zurich: LUMA Foundation, 2015), 454.





## Oursler 5A. Slip

With blinking eyes and whispering lips, Tony Oursler's projections of faces onto fiberglass sculptures create lifelike figures that make media imagery tangible.<sup>1</sup> Despite the alien forms of these "electronic effigies"<sup>1</sup>—as in the green, S-shaped *Slip* (2003)—their facial expressions and language communicate. Oursler's scripts sound like stream-of-consciousness ramblings or, as he describes, "a sort of babble, like someone's in a therapy session,"<sup>2</sup> initiating unfinished narratives that the viewer is left to complete. Mirroring human struggle and humor, they play on human empathy; like film and television characters with whom we bond, they invite our affinity.<sup>3</sup>

1. Tony Oursler, in "Who's Making It: Tony Oursler," *Gotham TV* segment, New York Metro TV, filmed 2001, video, 5:08, available at <http://tonyoursler.com/interviews>.
2. Tony Oursler, "Who's Making It: Tony Oursler," *Gotham TV* segment, New York Metro TV, filmed 2001, video, 5:08, available at <http://tonyoursler.com/interviews>.
3. Deborah Rothschild, "Introjection: In Oursler's World, No One Escapes Its Unbidden Influences," in *Tony Oursler: Introjection, Mid-career Survey, 1976–1999* (Williamstown, MA: Williams College Museum of Art, 1999), 14.

# ALAN RATH: United States, b. 1959



Born into the Machine Age

Robot Improv



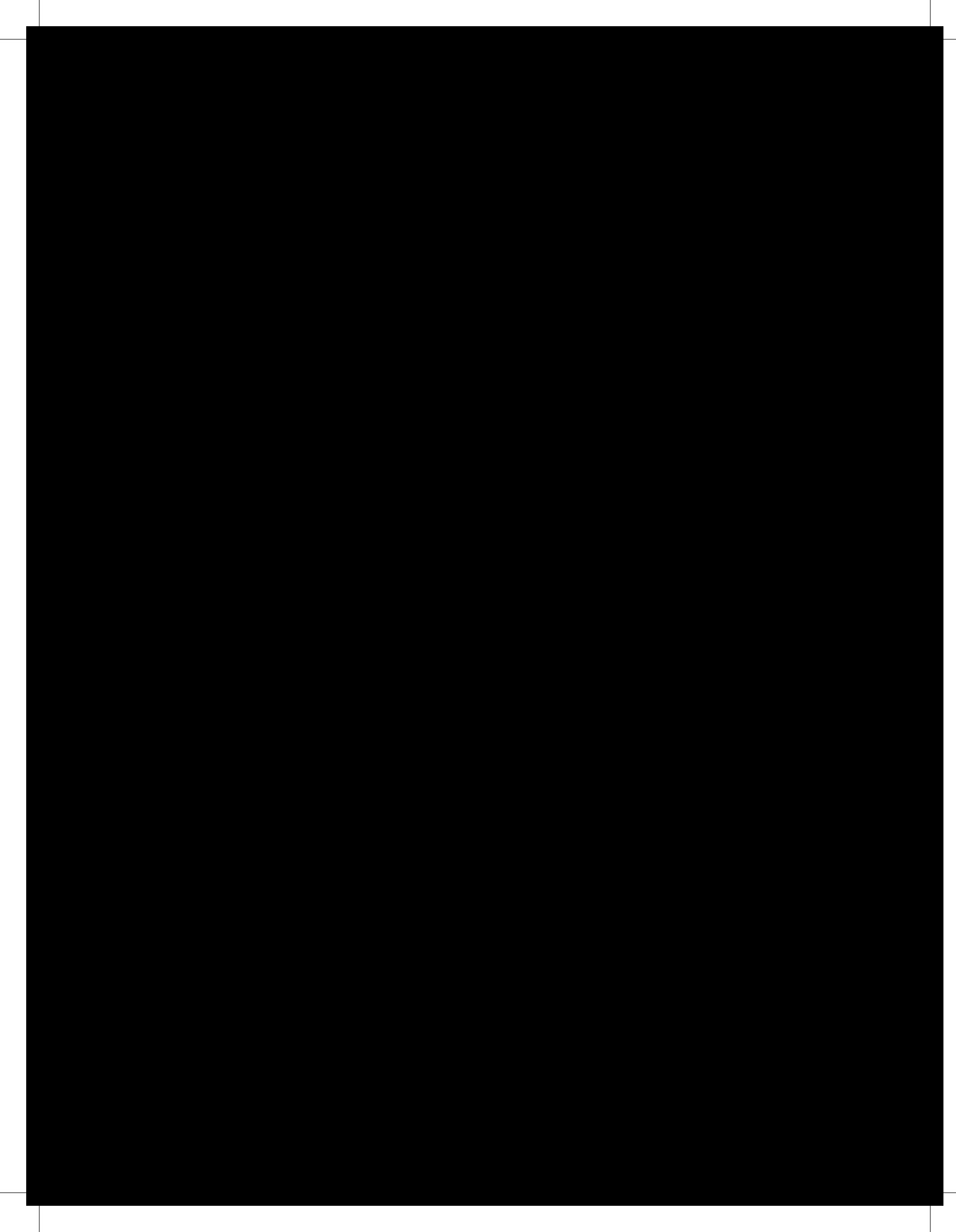
Systems Logic

Symbols of Sentience

*A lot of people use machines. I want to build machines. The best way to examine the meaning of machinery and the nature of machinery is to build it.<sup>1</sup>*

1. Alan Rath, in "NEAT: New Experiments in Art and Technology," Contemporary Jewish Museum, San Francisco, filmed 2015, video, 2:06, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9BLp9zyejkM>.



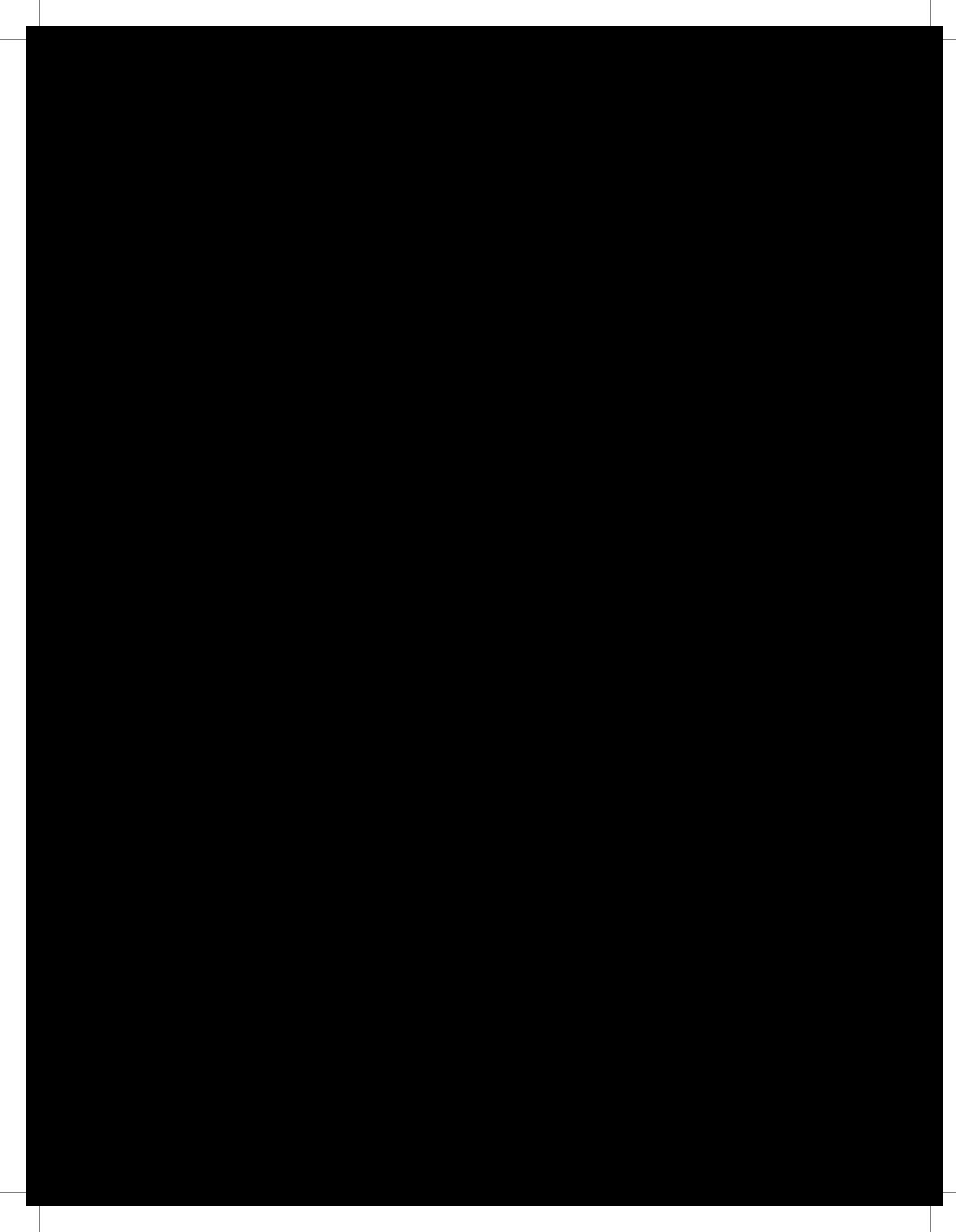


## Rath Banner. Born into the Machine Age

Since childhood, Alan Rath has been interested in machines. At twelve years old, the Moog synthesizer caught his attention, both for its mechanical sound as well as the beauty of its form. As a teenager he looked to musicians like Jimi Hendrix, who fused art with the machine when he incorporated guitar amplifier feedback into his innovative sound.<sup>1</sup> Rath earned a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1982 and taught himself mechanical engineering through experimentation. Since then, Rath has built and programmed his own sculptures; from their circuit boards to the software that runs them, everything is handmade. There is an intimacy, or a kind of "feedback loop,"<sup>2</sup> between the design and the build;

each build informs the next design, so that technology itself is not just equipment, or material, it is also the subject matter of Rath's work.<sup>3</sup>

1. Alan Rath, in "Critic and Artist Residency Series: Alan Rath," University Center for the Arts, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, filmed 2005, video, 1:02:14, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oW2nr9VeEas>.
2. Alan Rath, in "Critic and Artist Residency Series: Alan Rath," University Center for the Arts, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, filmed 2005, video, 1:02:14, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oW2nr9VeEas>.
3. Peter Boswell, *Viewpoints* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1991), 1.



<https://vimeo.com/294476061>

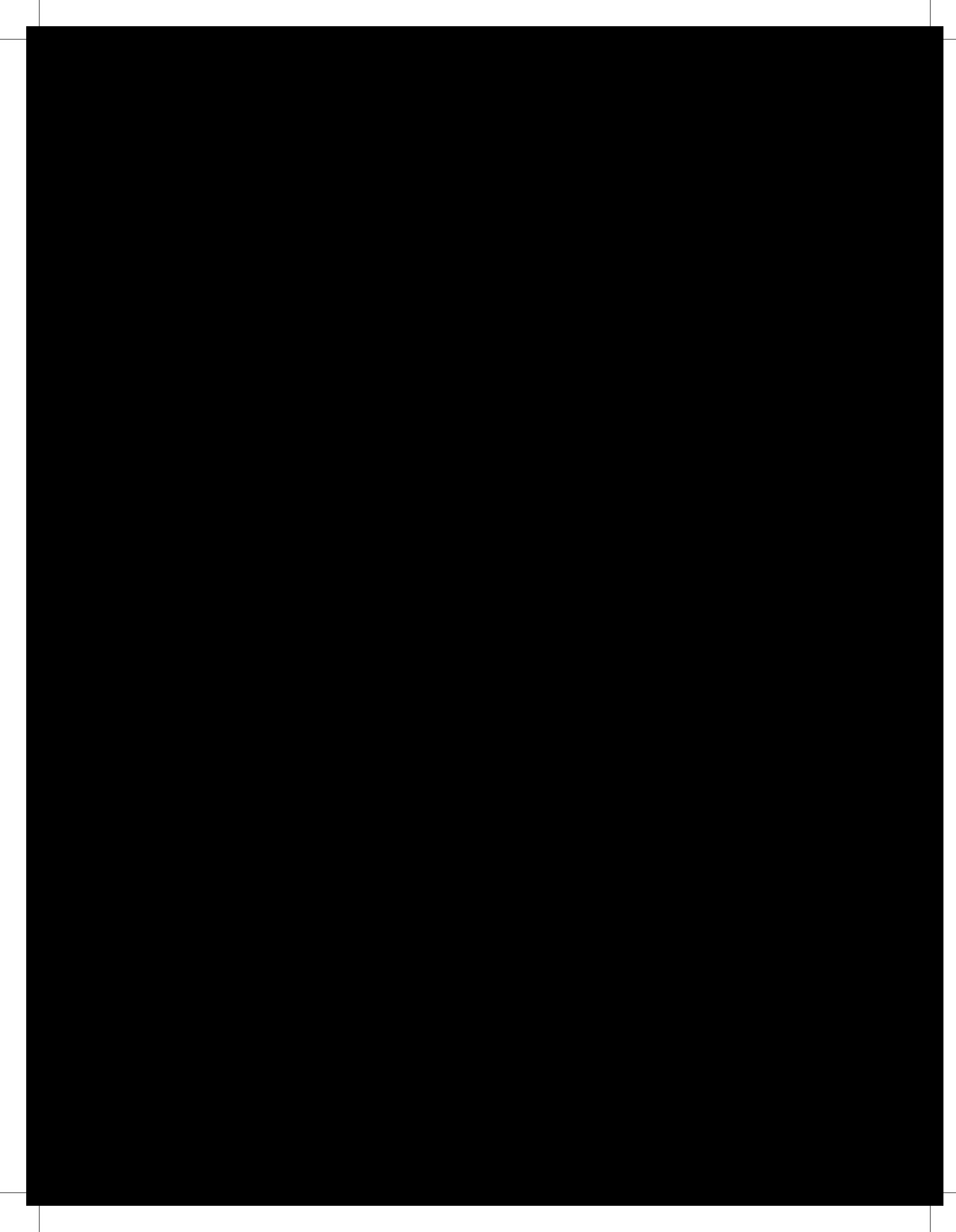
## Rath 5A. Robot Improv

Alan Rath's robotic sculptures often resemble living forms—humans, plants, or animals—alluding to the organic qualities of machines made in our image. While studying electrical engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Rath became interested in learning what he could get machines to do, rather than using machines to perform predetermined tasks.<sup>1</sup> The software he writes to animate his sculptures privileges play over thinking, leading them to perform and modify their behavior in relation with the world around them. Using light and motion sensors, robots like *Absolutely* (2012) improvise their own movement. As the artist has stated, “I want

to evoke that feeling of transience, information flow, and make objects which are active, alive, not passive.”<sup>2</sup> Influenced by the work of John Cage and Buckminster Fuller, Rath believes the art of our time should move.<sup>3</sup>

1. Peter Boswell, *Viewpoints* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1991), 1.
2. Alan Rath, in Dana Friis-Hansen, *Alan Rath: Bio-Mechanics: Perspectives 93* (Houston: Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, 1995), 4.
3. Peter Boswell, *Viewpoints* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1991), 2.





## Rath 4A. Systems Logic

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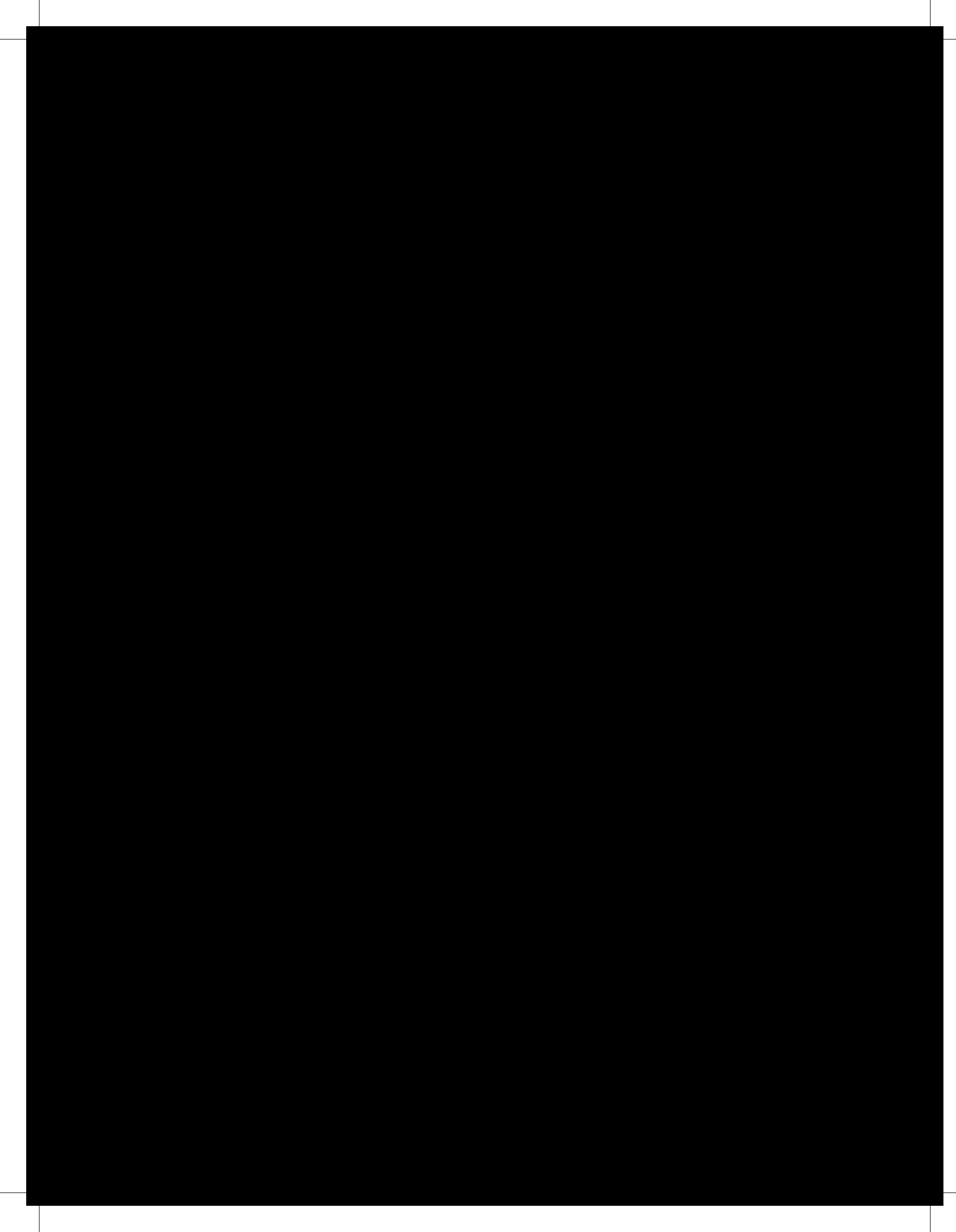
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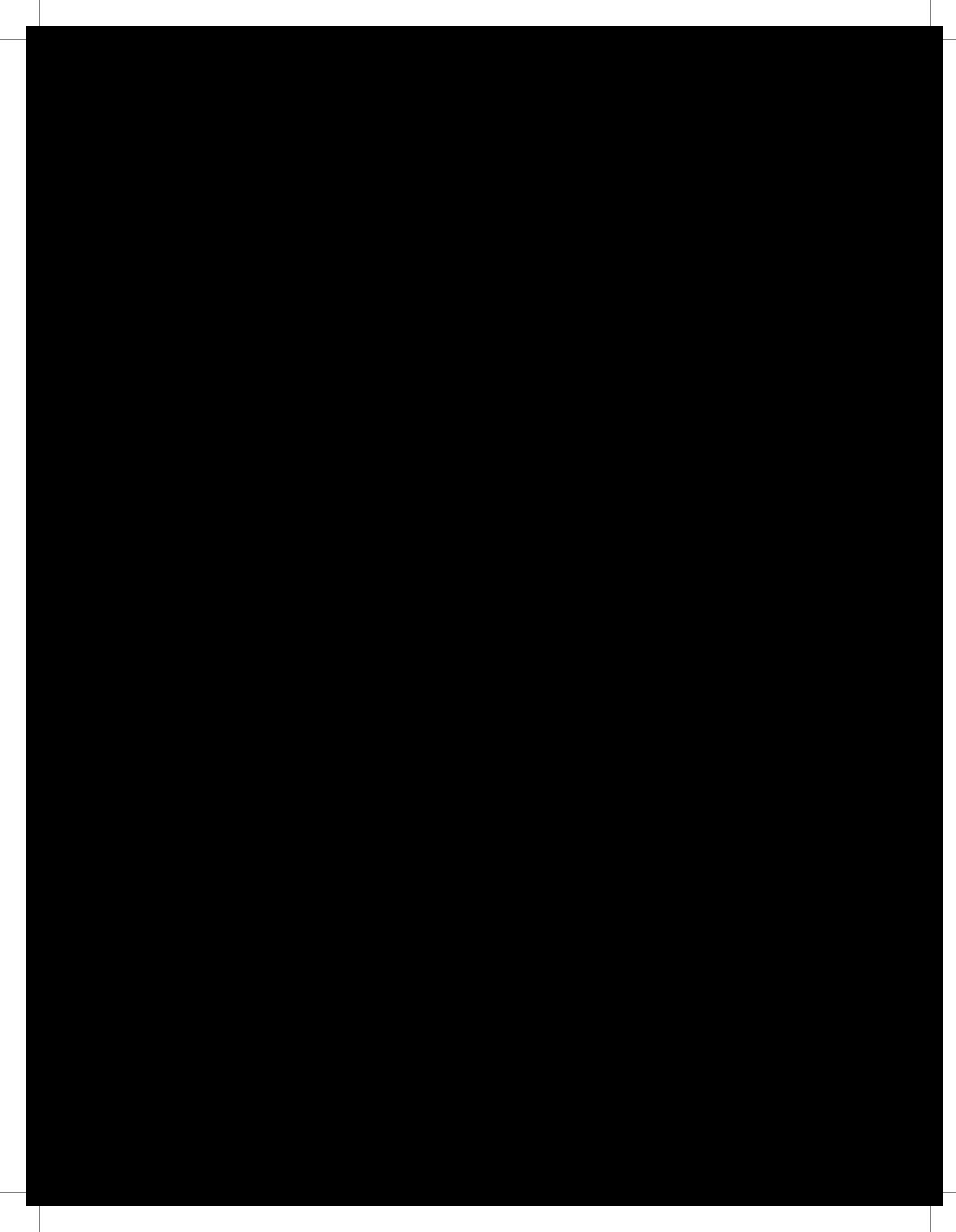
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Three cathode-ray tubes, one showing a human mouth and two featuring a hand each, are connected through curvilinear wires that send electrical impulses like a central nervous system in Alan Rath's *Info Glut II* (1997). Despite its synthetic quality, the sculpture's form speaks to underlying similarities between human bodies and machines. Gesturing in American Sign Language messages like "batteries not included" and "objects in mirror are closer than they appear," it mimics a sentient being overloaded with a litany of fragmented data. For the artist, electronic materials are basic elements of our everyday experience, which

his sculptures embody in both form and content: "I am making a window on our world, a picture of what is 'out there.'"<sup>1</sup> Trained as an electrical engineer, he is interested not only in how technology facilitates a process but in the structure or logic of the system; here, electronics are the process and the object.<sup>2</sup>

1. Dana Friis-Hansen, *Alan Rath: Bio-Mechanics: Perspectives 93* (Houston: Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, 1995), 2.
2. Peter Boswell, *Viewpoints* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1991), 2.





## Rath 3A. Symbols of Sentience

In the 1980s Alan Rath began making electronic sculptures with “body parts” that were recognizably human or animal, such as eyes, ears, and hands. “Machines are extensions of the sense organs, giving us the ability to ‘remote-sense’”<sup>1</sup>—like a telephone, for example. In the snail-like sculpture *Thumper V* (1996), a pair of pulsating speaker cones form the body and two smaller speakers perched on the tips of antennae suggest a pair of eyes. Moving at low, inaudible frequencies, the pulsing speakers seem to breathe and blink, mirroring the rhythms of the human body. In an

era dominated by virtual movement, Rath became interested in the physical movement of motorized sculptures. Like human surrogates, they point to the complex relationship of humans to technology, offering “critical alter egos to the sleek, efficient machines that surround us in daily life.”<sup>2</sup>

1. Alan Rath, in Kenneth Baker, “Alan Rath: Digital World,” *ARTnews*, May 1992, 70.
2. Peter Boswell, *Viewpoints* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1991), 1.

# JENNIFER STEINKAMP: United States, b. 1958



Breaking Boundaries

Sympathetic Image



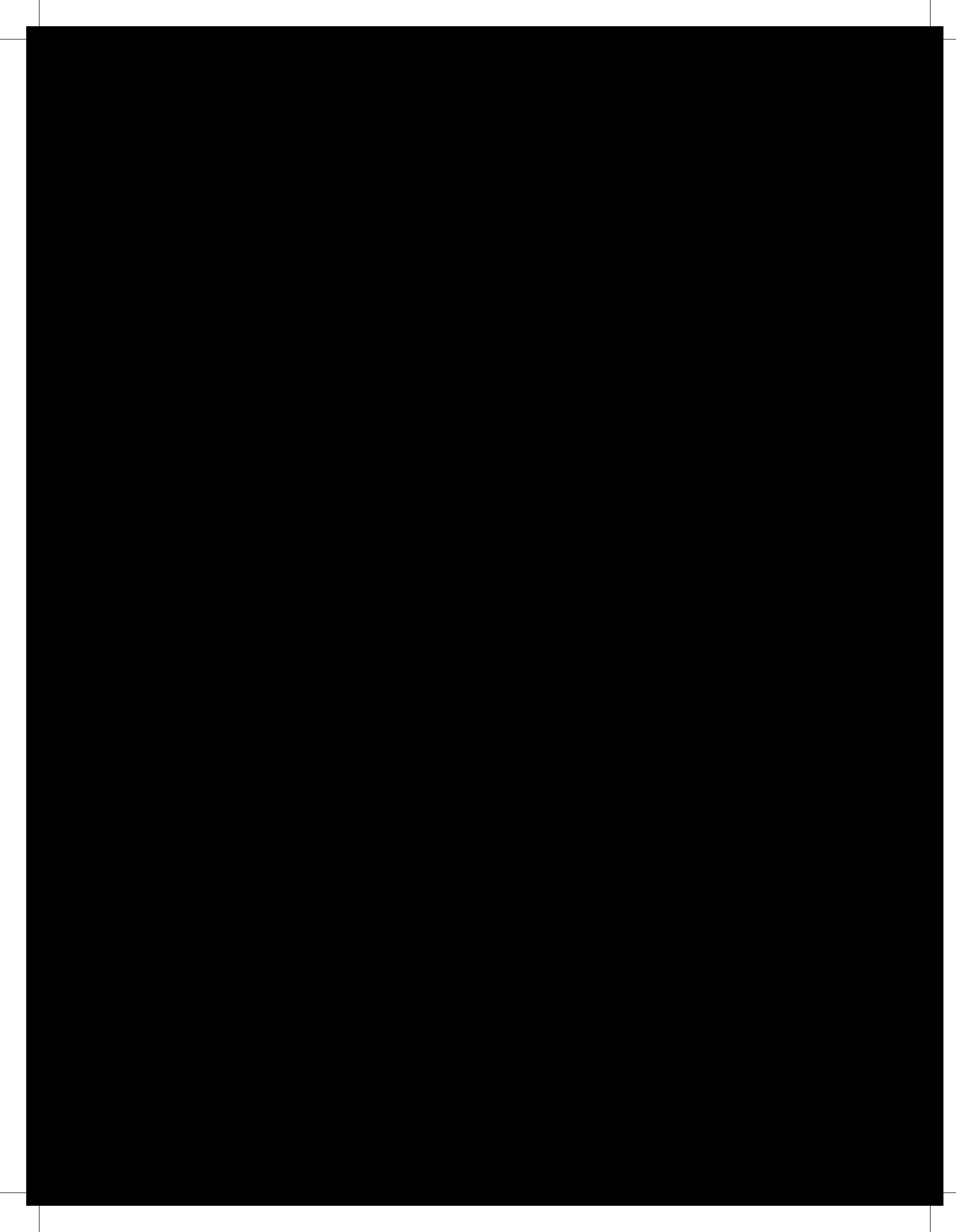
Transforming Architecture

The Body is a Canvas

*I began as someone who deeply appreciated abstract art. Loops seemed to be a way to work with abstraction and less representational forms.<sup>1</sup>*

1. Jennifer Steinkamp, interview with Sean Capone, “Animation and Abstraction: Jennifer Steinkamp interviewed by Sean Capone,” *bombmagazine.org*, posted September 18, 2018, <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/animation-and-abstraction-jennifer-steinkamp-interviewed>.



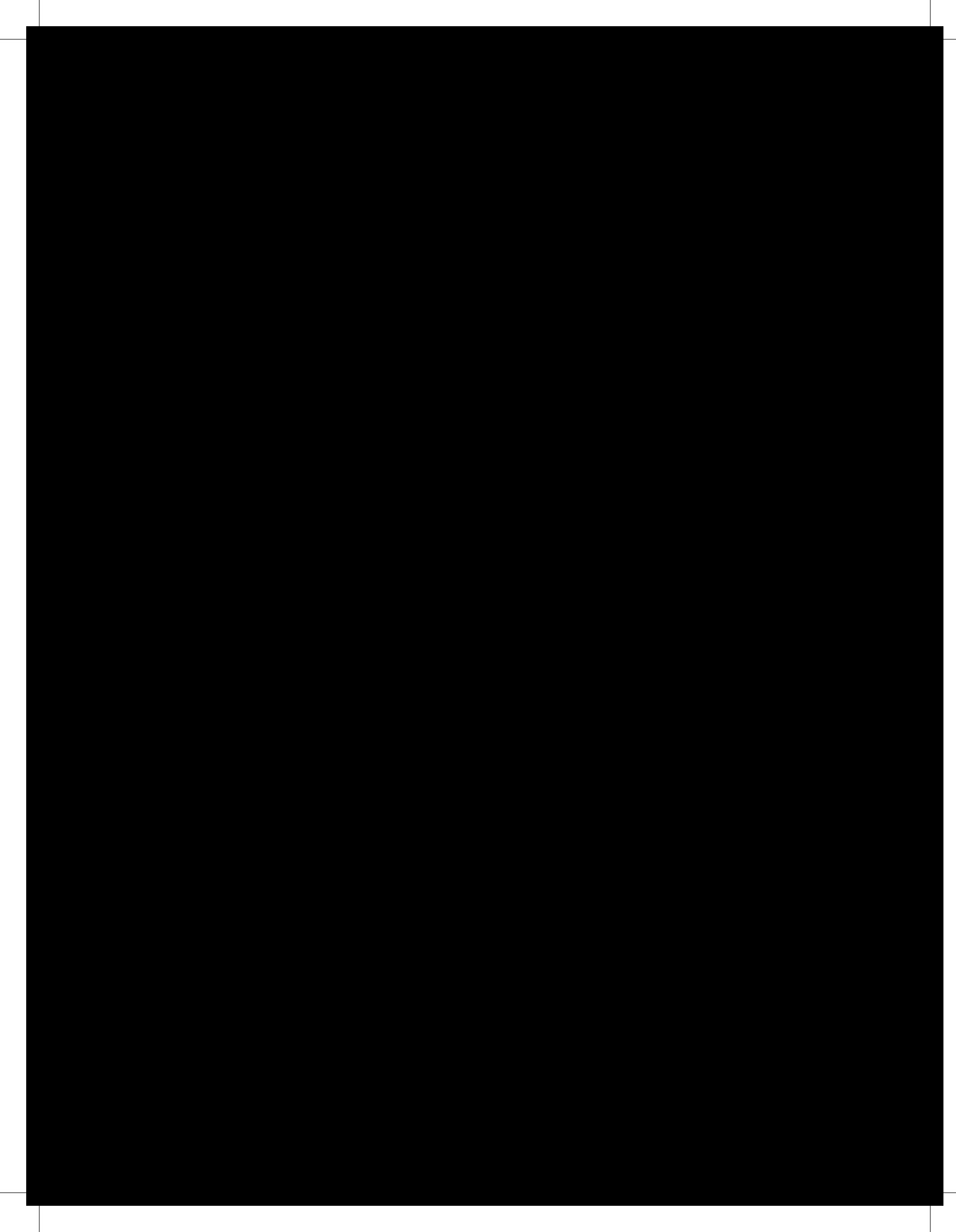


## Steinkamp Banner. Breaking Boundaries

Jennifer Steinkamp's large-scale installations often cast the viewer's shadow onto projected animations of abstract loops and grids, or digitally rendered stylized flowers and plants. They invite us to enter physically engaging aesthetic experiences that dissolve the boundary between viewer and object. She studied experimental animation at the California Institute of Technology with Gene Youngblood, author of the influential book *Expanded Cinema* (1970), who introduced her to computer-generated animation and structuralist film.<sup>1</sup> Looking to early experimental, nonnarrative filmmaking—like Paul Sharits's sensory-assaulting color flicker films and Michael Snow's dual-sided projections<sup>2</sup>—that reveal the structure of their presentation, Steinkamp's projections alert the viewer to their own physical presence within a space: “when

you walk through it you disrupt the illusion and weave yourself into the work.”<sup>3</sup>

1. Jennifer Steinkamp, interview with Sean Capone, “Animation and Abstraction: Jennifer Steinkamp interviewed by Sean Capone,” *bombmagazine.org*, posted September 18, 2018, <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/animation-and-abstraction-jennifer-steinkamp-interviewed>.
2. Peter Lunenfeld, *Snap to Grid: A User’s Guide to Digital Arts, Media, and Cultures* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2000), 151.
3. Jennifer Steinkamp, quoted in Catherine Shaw, “Arts preview: Jennifer Steinkamp’s swirling 3-D digital installations,” *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong), February 12, 2014, <https://www.scmp.com/magazines/48hrs/article/1422967/arts-preview-jennifer-steinkamps-swirling-3-d-digital-installations>.



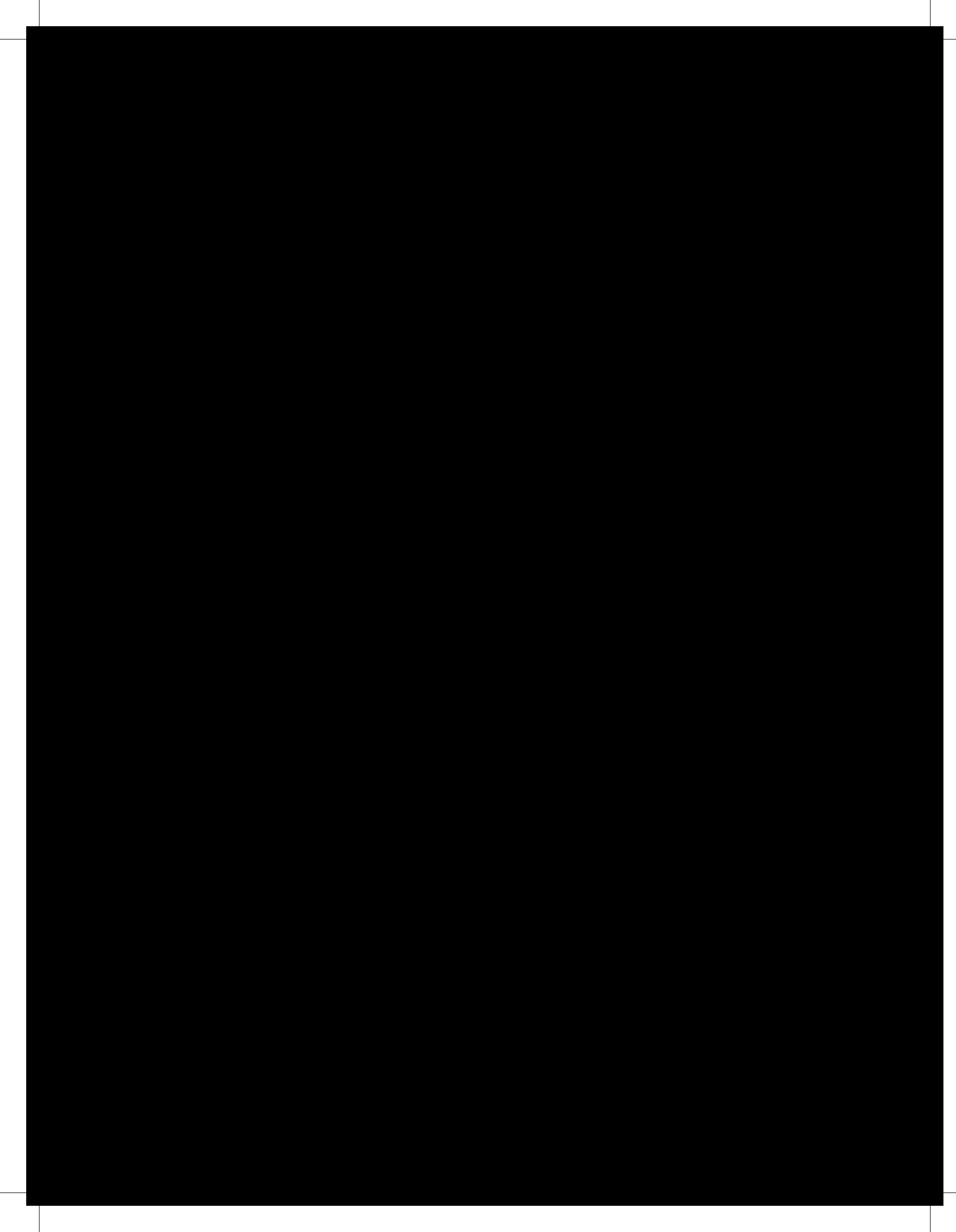
<https://vimeo.com/362171352>

## Steinkamp 3B. Sympathetic Image

*Fly to Mars (no. 1)* (2004) is part of a computer-animated series of projections by the artist depicting hyperreal trees that twist and bend. Without beginning or end, they cycle through the seasons, bearing colorful blossoms then lush summer leaves and russet fall colors before losing their foliage. Influenced by experimental film, which often uses repetition rather than a storyline to focus viewer attention on film's materiality rather than its content alone, Jennifer Steinkamp features the trees without narrative. Instead, their movement is abstract, "the motion of

pattern and cycle."<sup>1</sup> The tree's motion and changes over time imbue it with a kind of mortal energy mimicking our somatic experience of living, breathing, sleeping. They awaken sensations of our physical being, creating a "bond of sympathy"<sup>2</sup> between our bodily experience and the projected image.

1. Dave Hickey, *25 Women: Essays on their Art* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 76.
2. Dave Hickey, *25 Women: Essays on their Art* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 77.



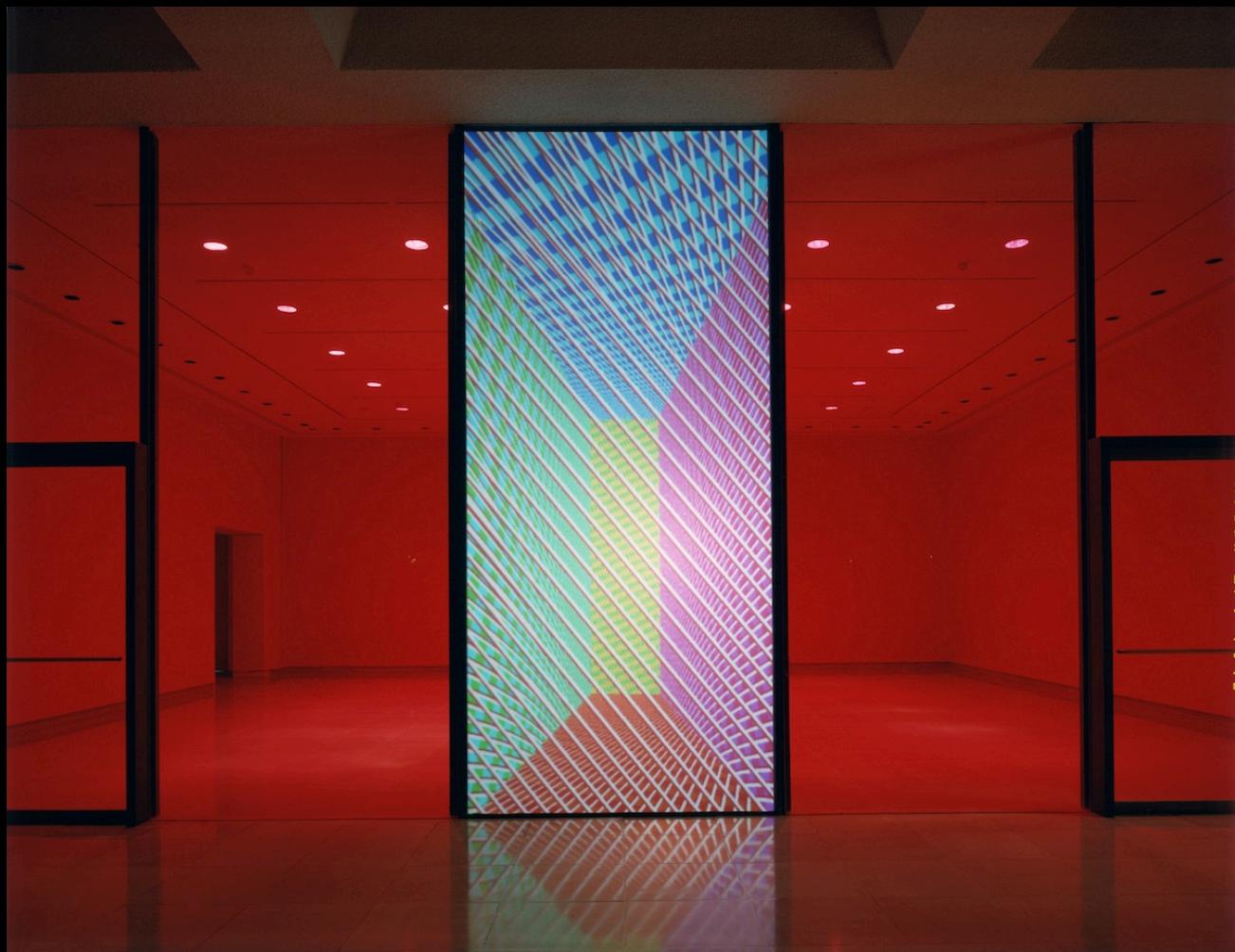
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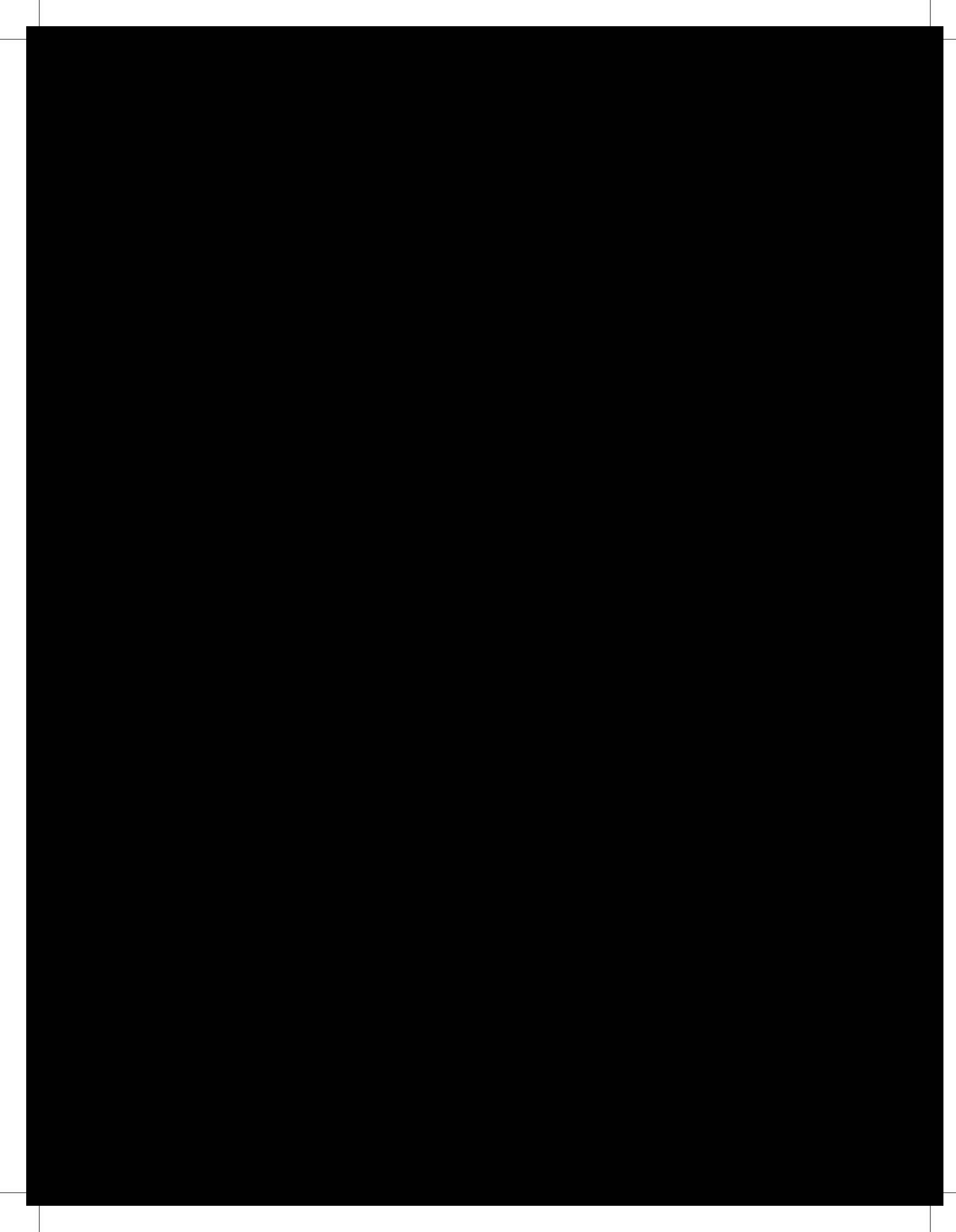
## Steinkamp 4A. The Body is a Canvas

In Jennifer Steinkamp's media installations, the spectator often becomes an element within the work.<sup>1</sup> For *Winter Fountains* (2017), an outdoor installation along Philadelphia's Benjamin Franklin Parkway, Steinkamp was inspired by the street's twentieth-century fountains to develop a kind of media "fountain"—a spectacle of light and moving images projected onto four large fiberglass domes around which passersby gather. As people approach, their "skin becomes a canvas"<sup>2</sup> for her otherworldly digital animations. Their bodies are transfigured in space

among colliding ice particles, floating floral forms, and bolts of lightning, which allude to the legacy of Benjamin Franklin.

1. Peter Lunenfeld, *Snap to Grid: A User's Guide to Digital Arts, Media, and Cultures* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2000), 149.
2. Peter Lunenfeld, *Snap to Grid: A User's Guide to Digital Arts, Media, and Cultures* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2000), 147.





## Steinkamp 5A. Transforming Architecture

Jennifer Steinkamp uses computer graphics and three-dimensional animations to create pulsing and undulating visual fields of pattern and abstract motion that shift our perspective. Working within the architecture of buildings, her projected images reconfigure surfaces to create the illusion of passages and portals or play with doorways to render floating imagescapes; immaterial substances such as computer graphics and light manifest as corporeal. In *one saw; the other saw* (2001), a light and sound installation at Rice University Art Gallery on which she collaborated with the composer Jimmy Johnson, a projection on the gallery's glass-front wall created the illusion of three dimensionality from both the interior and exterior of

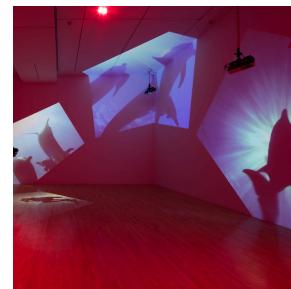
the space. "I use light to dematerialize architecture," says Steinkamp.<sup>1</sup> Using sensors to detect the movement of passersby, the projected image shifted in response to the viewer's point of view so that the architecture itself seemed to be moving.<sup>2</sup> Such motion-filled environments defy architecture's space and material structure to induce visceral responses that border on vertigo and alter one's mental state.

1. *Jennifer Steinkamp and Jimmy Johnson: one saw; the other saw* (2001), exhibition description on Rice University Art Gallery website, <http://www.ricegallery.org/steinkamp-johnson>.
2. *Rochelle Steiner, Wonderland (St. Louis: Saint Louis Art Museum, 2000)*, 24.

# DIANA THATER: United States, b. 1962



Another Kind of Time



Animal Angles

Space Is Like Water to a  
Fish

Deconstructing Video

*We move, record, project, and see, changing the nature and configuration of what we see through our movement and our being and, ultimately, find ourselves not looking at the work of art but with it.<sup>1</sup>*

1. Diana Thater, quoted in Lynne Cooke, "Knots and Surfaces: A Gnosis," in *Diana Thater: Knots and Surfaces*, ed. Lynne Cooke and Karen Kelly (New York: Dia Center for the Arts, 2002), 53.

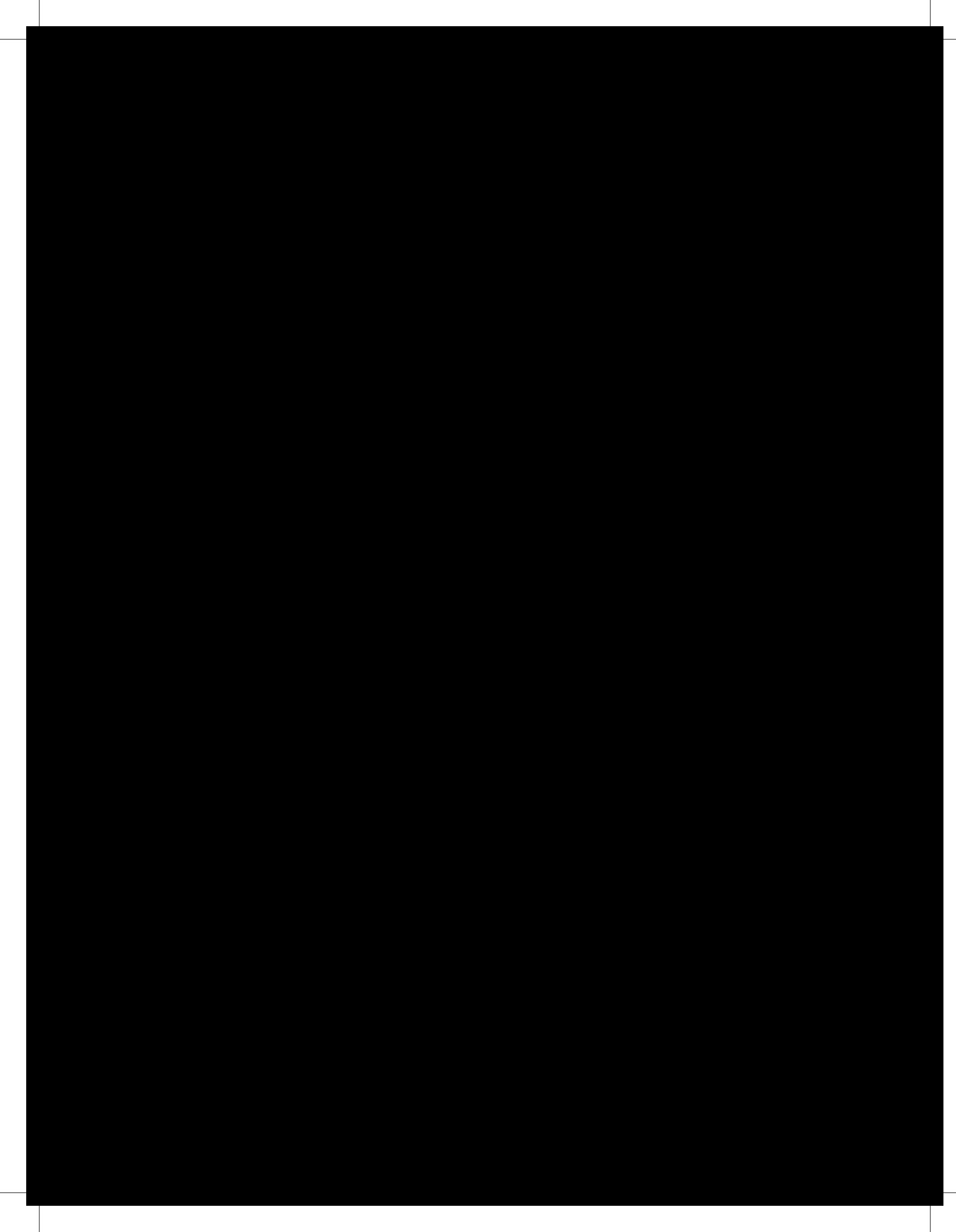
## Thater Banner. Another Kind of Time

Diana Thater films in the natural world, capturing how animals such as wolves, elephants, bees, and dolphins inhabit another kind of time and space. Playing with the temporal and spatial qualities inherent to film and video installation, Thater considers the ways media—like traditional Hollywood films and nature documentaries—shape our understanding of the world around us. She says, “It’s really about questioning how we know animals, how is information about animals delivered to us. . . . I want us to find different ways to think through living, and different ways to construct

power. How do we think about the natural world in a way that doesn’t destroy it?”<sup>1</sup> A pioneer of video installation art, Thater models her work on animal environments, exploring video’s capacity for imagining nonnarrative time and expanded perception to induce a sympathetic response.

1. Diana Thater, in “Diana Thater: ‘Delphine,’” \*Art21/\*Extended Play, episode 240 (October 2016), video, 4:25 minutes, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cR8hHg06ooY>.





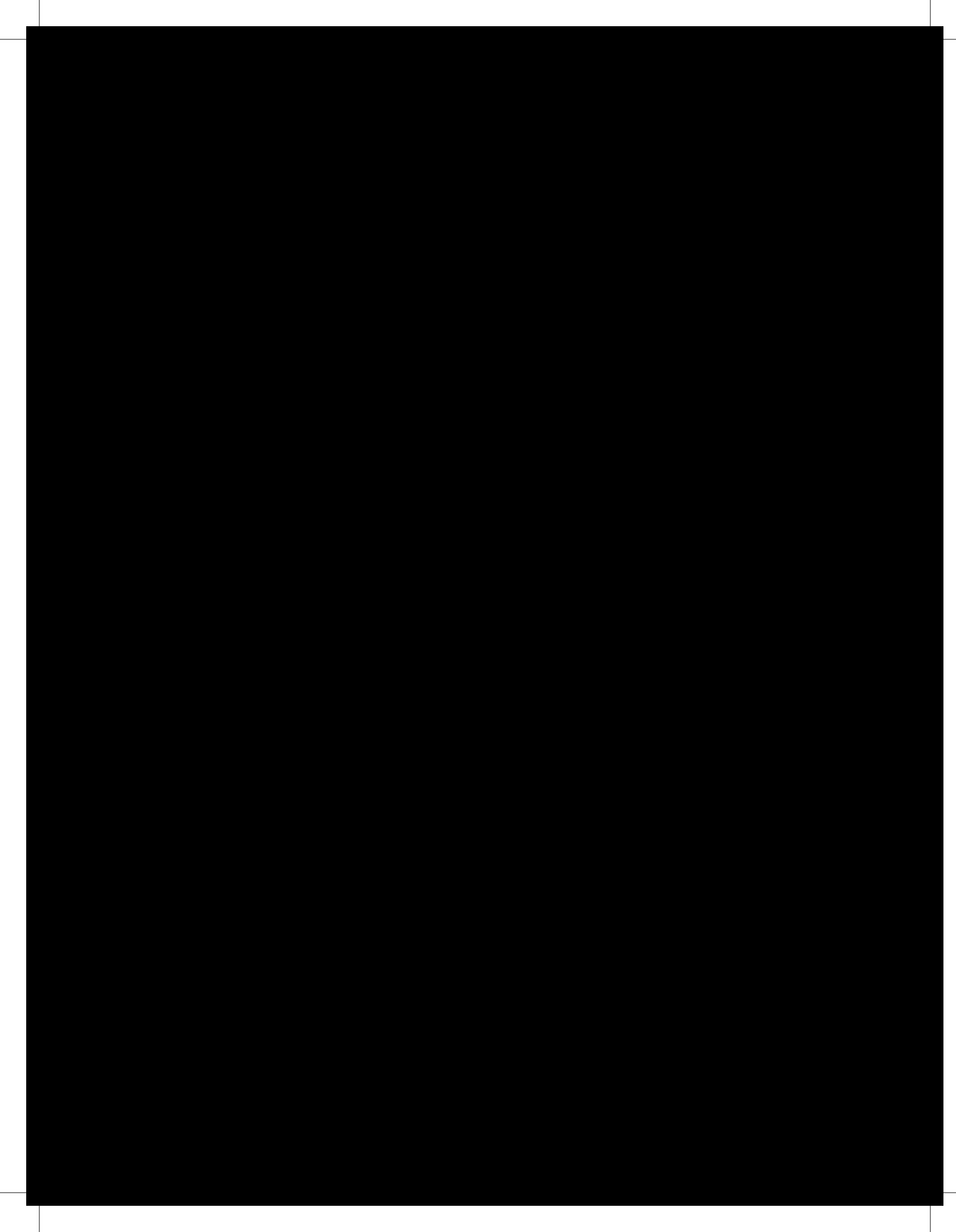
## Thater 3A. Deconstructing Video

Through multiple projections and screens situated in various spatial configurations—as in the monitors arranged lying on the floor in *Untitled (Butterfly Videowall #2)* (2008)—Diana Thater’s video art installations shift viewing perspectives to change the way we experience video in relation to space. In her early work, the artist was interested in deconstructing the basic components of video by dividing images into red, green, and blue, the primary colors of light;<sup>1</sup> as the artist says, “once you find the limitations of the language, you can exceed them.”<sup>2</sup> In *Untitled (Butterfly Videowall #2)*, Thater breaks apart the wall of monitors that would together show a comprehensive image; placing them upturned on the floor, they mimic the position of monarch butterflies resting on the ground

at the El Rosario Monarch Butterfly Sanctuary, the preservation site in Mexico where the video was shot. Seen at our feet, their fractured images of a butterfly slowly flapping its wings alter how viewers see dimensionality in video, suggesting that the experience of space, like images, is constructed.

1. “Diana Thater: The Artist’s Museum,” The Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles, filmed 2010, video, 4:11, available at <https://vimeo.com/16326381>.
2. Diana Thater, in Lynne Cooke, “Interview with Diana Thater,” September 14, 2014, published in *Diana Thater: The Sympathetic Imagination* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art; and Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2015), 22.





## Thater 4D. Animal Angles

For Diana Thater, the world of animals suggests alternative models of spatial realities from the gravity-bound human perspective.<sup>1</sup> Her video installation *Delphine* (1999) features a pod of free dolphins as they twist and dive in three-dimensional movement through the depths of the ocean and breaks through its surface. Images projected at various angles wrap around corners of the gallery and bend onto the ceiling and floor. The installation itself, overlaying the constraints of human architecture with a volumetric space, is informed by the way dolphins interact with their environment. Breaking from the conventional filming of animals, in which the camera is an extension of a voyeuristic viewer,<sup>2</sup> in Thater's framing the artist and viewer look through, not at, the animal world.<sup>3</sup>

1. Michael Govan, "More Wolves Are Better Than One," in *Diana Thater: The Sympathetic Imagination* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art; and Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2015), 120.
2. Michael Govan, "More Wolves Are Better Than One," in *Diana Thater: The Sympathetic Imagination* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art; and Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2015), 123.
3. Diana Thater, in conversation with Hildegund Amanshauser, January 2000, published in *The Secession Talks: Exhibitions in Conversation 1998–2010* (Cologne, Germany: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König; and New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 2012), 122.

## Thater 5A. Space Is Like Water to a Fish

While artists often project film and video work in a black box—a theater-like setting that facilitates the suspension of disbelief, allowing the viewer to escape into the world of the video—Diana Thater illuminates the gallery with intense colored light to heighten viewers' awareness of their surroundings. She describes the gallery space as “water to a fish”<sup>1</sup> because one can never wholly see it from the outside. For Thater, light is not illusionistic but experiential: “It’s something that needs to be navigated and it’s something that needs to be survived. But to a fish, water is an invisibility the same way space is to us. I

wanted to figure out a way to make people aware of the space they occupy while they’re occupying it, and to see a space like an object . . . and when you go into it, you’re in the glowing light and you see, you sense, you feel this kind of fizz of color, this intensity.”<sup>2</sup>

1. Diana Thater, in “Creative Minds: Diana Thater,” San José Museum of Art, filmed 2015, video, 2:45, available at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cSUL\\_uPfinE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cSUL_uPfinE).
2. Diana Thater, in “Creative Minds: Diana Thater,” San José Museum of Art, filmed 2015, video, 2:45, available at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cSUL\\_uPfinE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cSUL_uPfinE).

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