



JASON PETERS:

Anti.Gravity.Material.Light

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Front Cover: *Visceral Paradigm* (2010).
Back Cover: *Untitled* (2009).
Right Detail: *I am All Ways in One* (2010).

NEW FRONTIERS: Series for Contemporary Art

JASON PETERS:
Anti.Gravity.Material.Light

January 28 – April 11, 2010
Oklahoma City Museum of Art

Acknowledgments and Introduction



The Oklahoma City Museum of Art is pleased to present *JASON PETERS: Anti.Gravity. Material.Light*, the first installment of the *NEW FRONTIERS: Series for Contemporary Art* at the museum. *NEW FRONTIERS* underscores the museum's commitment to the art-of-our-time and to recognizing contemporary art as a critical and dynamic part of our daily lives. The series provides a framework for the exchange of ideas between the museum, artists, and the community, while connecting to the larger international dialogue on contemporary art and new perspectives in the field.

Peters' installations are big. They are complex, and they employ the use of ready-made objects. The artist creates rather extraordinary installations using ordinary things like light bulbs, buckets, chairs, tires, and more, in part out of necessity, in part out of desire, and in

part because he is compelled to transform and transpose our understanding of things.

Born in Mobile, Alabama, Peters grew up in Munich, Germany, and returned to the United States as a young adult to attend the Maryland Institute, College of Art, in Baltimore, where he earned his Bachelor of Fine Arts. Peters then moved further up the East Coast to Brooklyn, New York, where he has lived for the past 12 years.

For the exhibition *Anti.Gravity.Material.Light*, Peters came to Oklahoma City for three weeks and created four large-scale, site-specific, installations in the museum's six thousand square foot temporary exhibition gallery. A fifth work was produced and installed in a public space of the museum. Consisting of four concept sections—Chaos, Order, Micro Organic, and Illusion—the

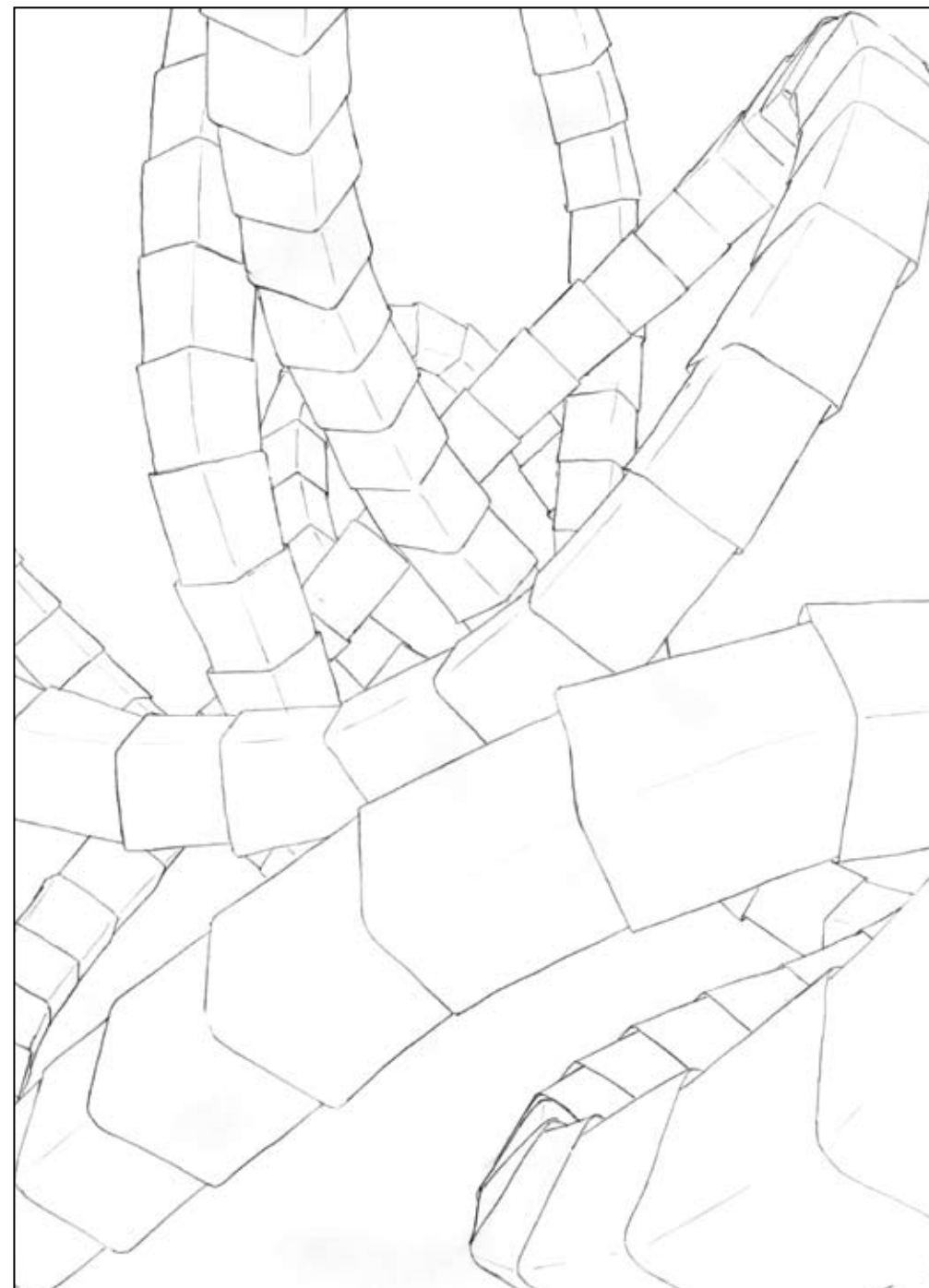
sculptures are augmented by a selection of drawings and cut-outs that relate to each individual installation. The essay for this catalogue, by Elizabeth Grady, titled *Peters in Wonderland*, provides insight into the artist's process, and illuminates aspects of the artist's practice that is both revealing and mysterious. I would like to thank our student assistants from the University of Oklahoma, Michael Hill, Michael Tresemer, and Jared Flaming, who worked diligently on the project and who gained important career experience throughout the process.

I want to thank the Oklahoma City Museum of Art's Board of Trustees for their support and for their numerous contributions that ultimately make the institution a sustainable and important cultural asset for the city and state. Thanks also to the entire museum staff for their ongoing teamwork and commitment to excellence in museum practice, and additionally to Ernesto Sanchez, Jim Meeks, and Christina Hicks for their hospitality to the artist and tireless work on the exhibition. The Oklahoma City Museum of Art is fortunate to have many generous patrons who provide ongoing support in amazing ways; I wish to acknowledge them here for their unflagging belief in the museum, its mission and programs. Special thanks to Grant DeFehr for his thoughtful encouragement and support of this project.

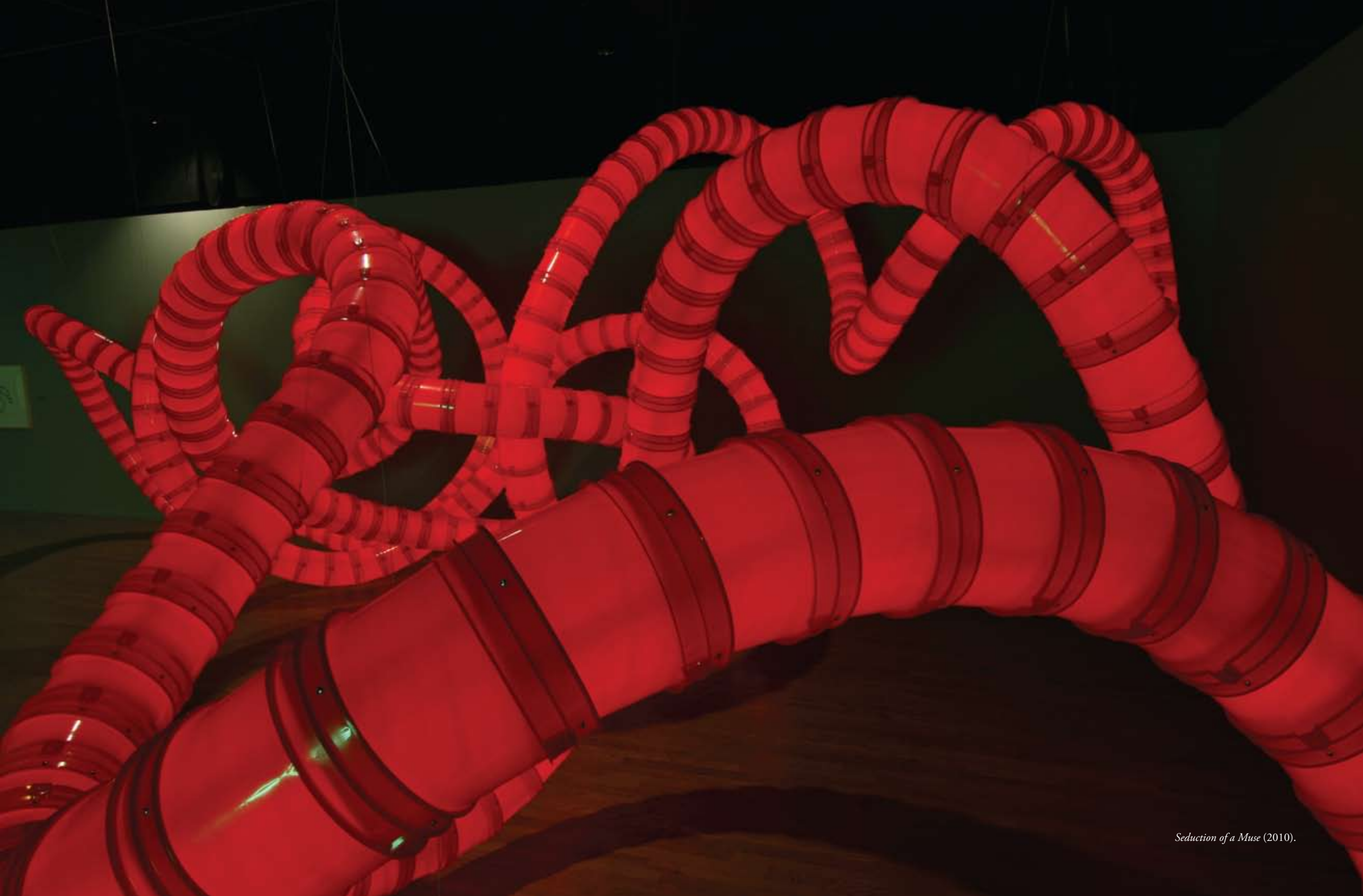
On behalf of the Board of Trustees and everyone at the Oklahoma City Museum of Art, I would like to extend extra special thanks to our program sponsors, who help to make everything we do possible; the museum's docent corps, volunteers, friends, and students, for their fantastic support of the museum individually and collectively each day; and to Jason Peters for his commitment to art and for creating an excellent and thought-provoking exhibition with finesse.

- Glen Gentele

President and Chief Executive Officer



Above: *Untitled* (2009).





Peters in Wonderland

Hovering over, snaking around, or threatening to topple onto the viewer, the work of Jason Peters makes a dramatic impact. Subtly transforming mundane objects into formally elegant installations, Peters succeeds in changing viewers' perceptions of space and reality. Turning the corner into the gallery, one encounters a dim space, lit by the imposing sculptures that twist and teeter within it. The initial encounter with the work can be startling, creating a moment of suspended expectation in which the psyche remains, for a brief pause, a blank slate.

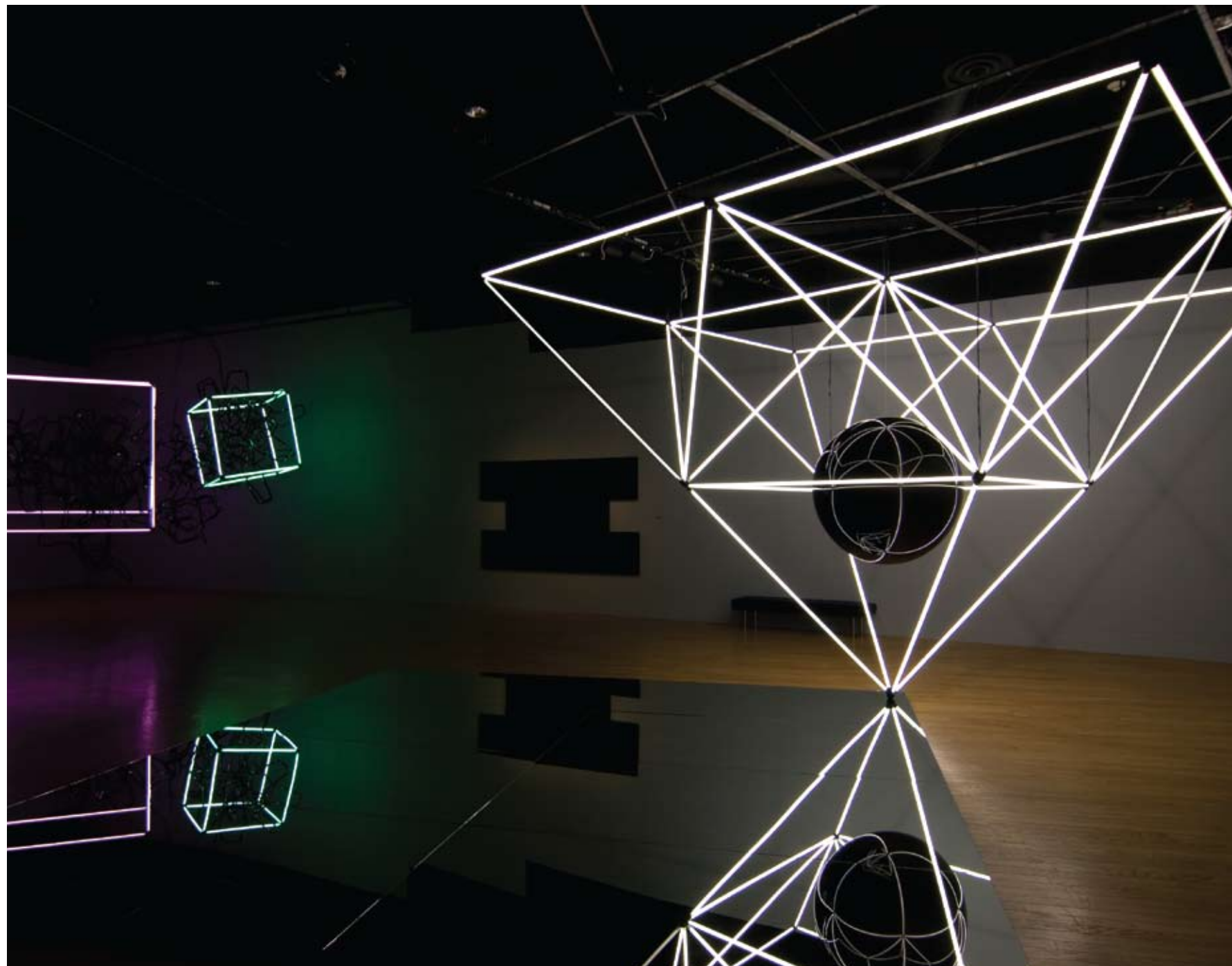
Peters strives to achieve installations that provide a transformative moment, removing the viewer from accustomed modes of thinking and seeing, from the constraints of id and ego, if only for a second. Visceral, emotional reactions are his goal. His abstract works, carefully calibrated to their indoor or outdoor

sites, operate within the notion of a kind of contemporary sublime. Conventionally associated with grand picturesque landscapes of the eighteenth century, the sublime deals with feelings of fear and awe that one experiences when confronted with things—in Edmund Burke's classic definition, objects of nature—which are dark, mysterious, incomprehensible, and potentially threatening. The sublime gives way to feelings of pleasure and joy when the viewer recognizes that there is no immediate threat. Peters' sculptures and installations work in precisely this way, initially disorienting the viewer, then giving way to the delight of solving his visual puzzles and enjoying the works' graceful and colorful forms.

This emotional impact is heightened by an altered perception of space, created by the inclusion of mirrors on the walls and floor. At the Oklahoma City Museum of Art, this can

be seen most clearly in *I am All Ways in One* (2010). In the room devoted to the piece, one sees a lit form snaking through the darkened space like pipe or conduit. Its segmented yet sinuous appearance also suggests organic forms like spinal columns, serpents, and tentacles, its internal glow recalling the phosphorescence of deep-sea creatures. Whether the associations are organic or inorganic, however, all seem to point to things that are earthbound, subterranean, or hidden beneath the surface. There is a feeling of secrecy or submersion, enhanced by the room's darkness, and when one has the luxury of experiencing the work alone, it can be pretty disconcerting, and alternately calming.

The mirrors that Peters uses create a perceptual distortion and sense of indeterminacy that is distinctly disorienting—an effect intensified by the twilight ambience and the choice to paint the gallery walls black and dark gray, so that their presence is less obtrusive, the museum's white-box gallery less evident. On walking in, the sense of reality is immediately ruptured. The eye struggles continually, while moving through the space, to determine what is real and what is reflected. The floor and walls of the gallery seem to open up like a yawning abyss, with sections of the sculpture and the room appearing to be doubled, and the difference between positive and negative image, actual and imaginary space become confused. This is not an installation for those susceptible to vertigo—even



without it, one quickly becomes dizzy. The disorientation is relieved only when the eye begins to decipher the difference between mere image and physical reality.

The mental acrobatics that the perceptual distortion of *I am All Ways in One* demands are, however, not limited to the sense of space. The installation also acts as a metaphysical jungle gym, challenging the viewer to engage with the definitions of absence and presence, even as it confronts the cloudy liminal divide between appearance and reality, visual perception and

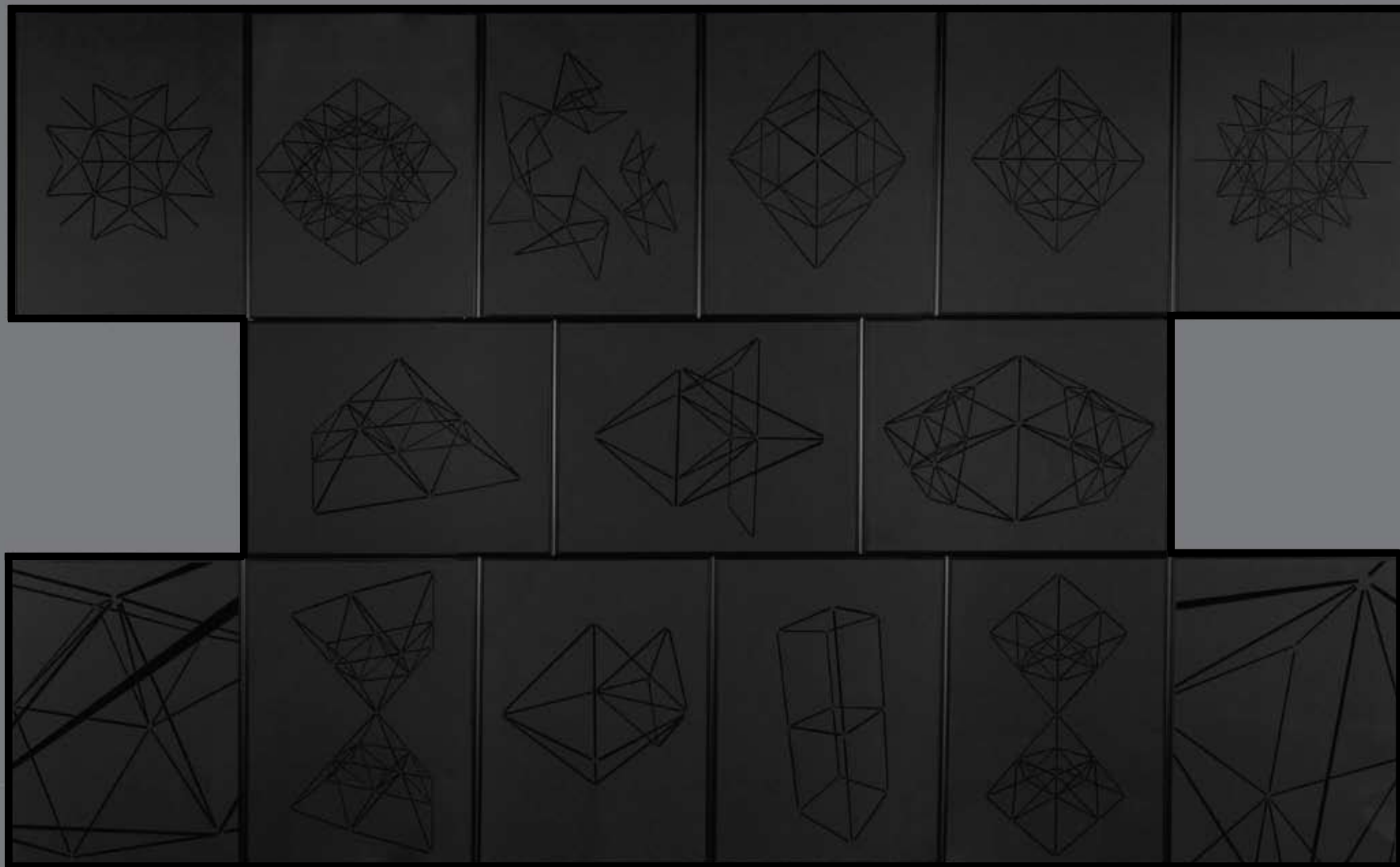
physical experience. Peters' work draws us through the looking glass, where nothing is as it seems, and our notions of reality are exposed as mere assumptions, based on perceptions and experiences that may or may not bear any actual relationship to the way the world works. Instead, we are invited to suspend past experience and enter into a world where the mind is allowed free rein, even as the body remains constrained by the laws of gravity and the sometimes perceptually imperceptible limits that contain it.

Below: *I am All Ways in One* (2010).

In the neighboring gallery, mirrors also play a key role, but here their ability to disorient is delimited by their size, the distance between the various works on view, and light. The differences between them allow the viewer visual reference points that inhibit the bewildering spatial distortion experienced in the previous room. However, the tension that the lack of spatial clarity created in *I am All Ways in One* is replaced here by a sense of physical precariousness. In *Frailty of Structural Chaos* (2010), for example, a jumble of vintage-style banquet hall chair frames are suspended

in a corner, intersecting three cubes of various sizes and colors made from fluorescent lights. It appears that the tensile strength of the steel that holds the entire grouping in place might fail at any time, sending the chair frames scattering, smashing the electrified light tubes against the frames, walls, and floor with an explosive crash and sending glass shards flying toward the viewer. When experiencing this work, one is acutely aware of the frailty of the human body and the trust that one has placed in the artist and the installation staff. The sense of potential danger that is the hallmark of the





sublime is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in this piece.

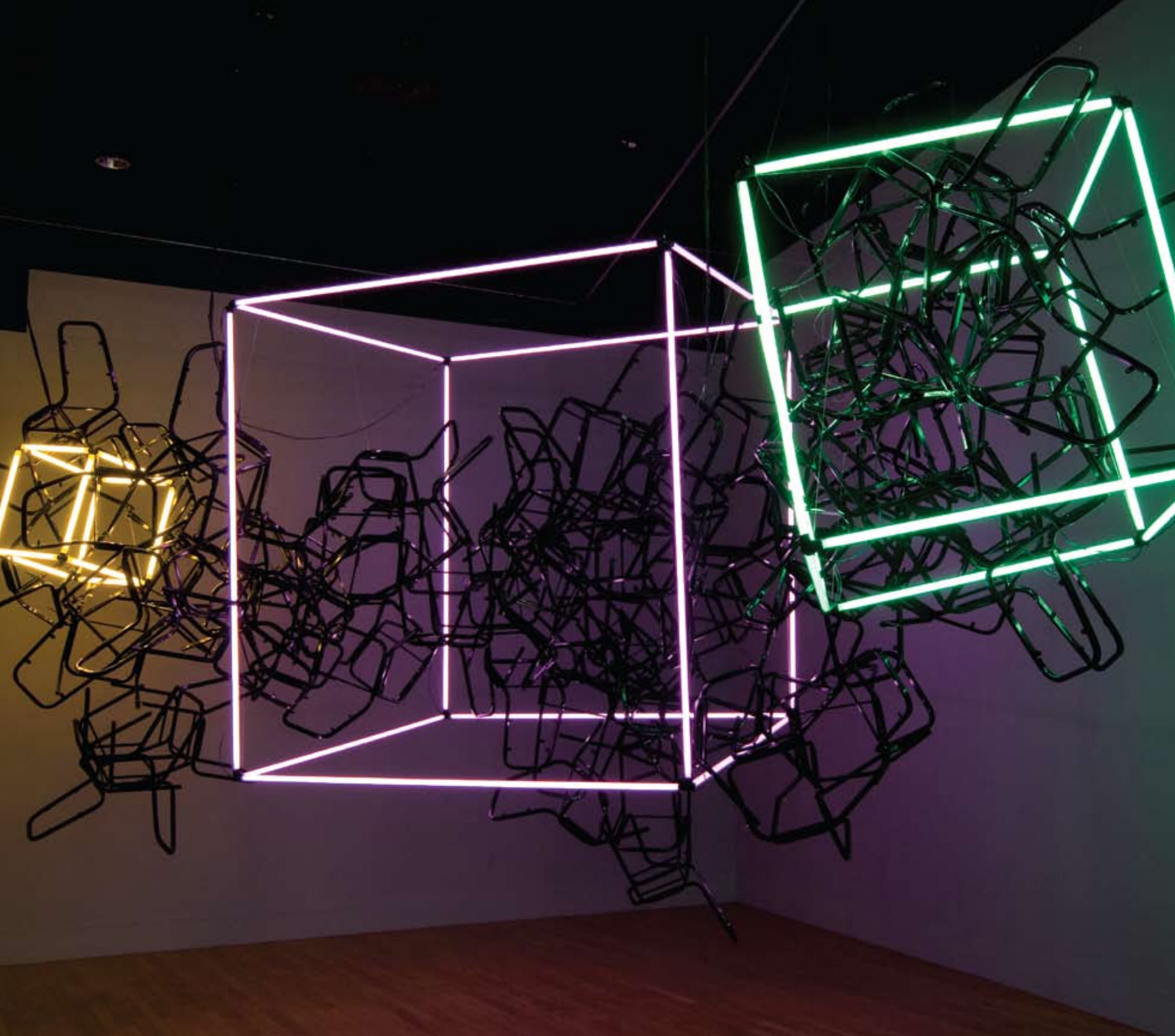
Here, too, the artist uses visual cues to investigate the intersection between philosophy and physics. The bright, tightly constructed, and crisply geometric order of the cubes is suspended in a messy junk-heap of chaos. It suggests the ongoing human endeavor to make sense of the world, even as it brings into sharp focus the contrast between the traditional role of reason-based, scientific thinking and new directions in physics that explore entropy, research chaos theory, and rely on the intentional indeterminacy of Heisenberg's uncertainty principle. In addition, the notion that the relative position of observation determines what can be seen and measured is suggested in the way the viewer's experience of the work changes as one moves closer to the mirrored section of the floor. Initially, one sees *Frailty of Structural Chaos*, in a finite way, hung in the corner, but as one passes through the space, and the viewpoint changes, the work becomes reflected in the floor section of *Visceral Paradigm* (2010) like a kind of three-dimensional Rorschach image of the artist's intentions for the viewer's changing experience.

The sense of precariousness and the references to physics and the functioning of the universe found in *Frailty of Structural Chaos* also are found in *Visceral Paradigm*. In its neatly

ordered geometry of triangles, a square, a sphere, and a pyramid, it seems the very antithesis of the previously discussed work. However, by making the sculpture appear to balance on its tip, Peters achieves the same sense that it might overbalance dangerously, falling on the viewer. Because of the way the pyramid works with the point of the mirrored square, from a certain vantage point it makes the mirror seem like an opening in the floor and possibly a parallel universe. Its careful geometry suggests a model for something, indeed a paradigm as the title suggests. The presence of the reflective black ball in the center, along with its dark color and the pale lines that are reflected in it, inevitably calls to mind globes of the universe, with the stars and constellations picked out in detail against a black or deep-blue, starry background. However, the sphere reflects back a vision of the universe that does not match up with the perception of the naked human eye. Instead, the lines curve. As it turns out, Peters is showing us an aspect of reality we've only just recently discovered. Physicists now tell us that space itself is actually curved. Further, the black color of the sphere, and the way that it interacts with the pyramid, could indicate a reference to dark matter: the term used by physicists to account for anomalies in the gravitational density of space. Thus, Peters' sculpture renders visible yet another universal puzzle that humanity has long been engaged in solving—the mystery of the character and origins of the universe.



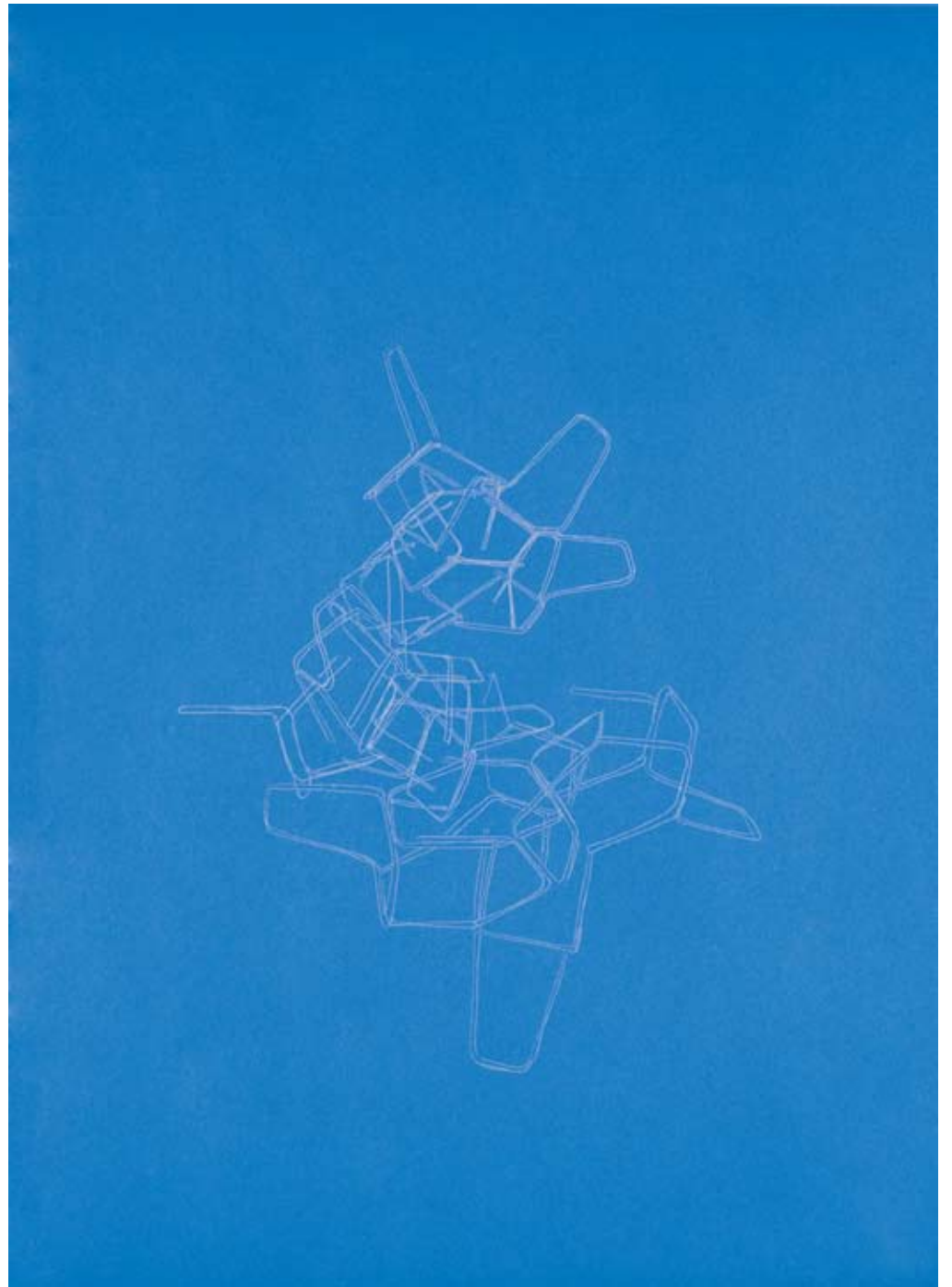
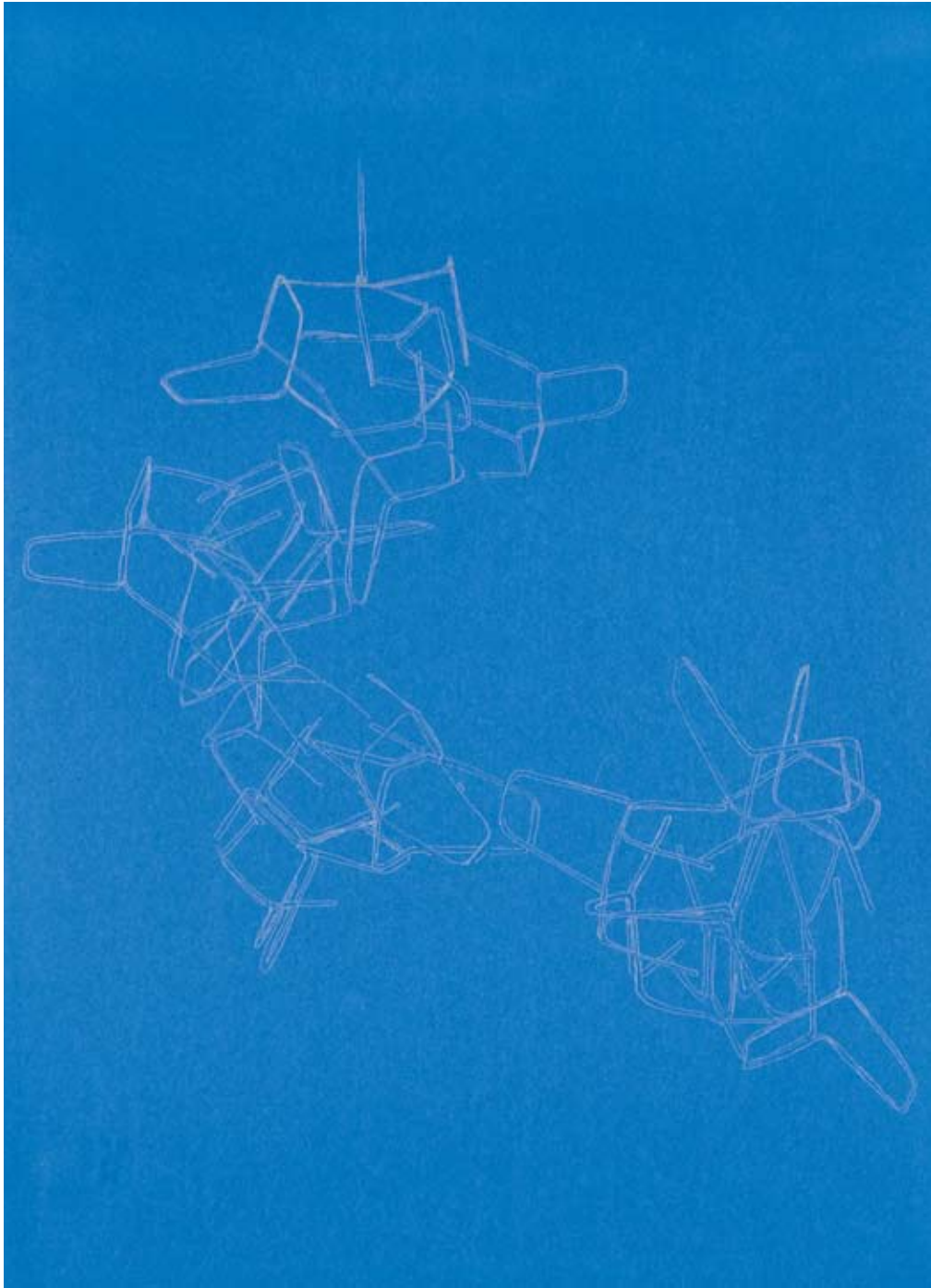
Above: *Promising Casualty* (2010).



The minimal elegance of Peters' work is at once seductive and deceptive. Drawn into his world by dramatic effects, graceful shapes, and exuberant colors, we are left in a funhouse wonderland of visual mysteries. Momentarily lulled into a sense of comfort by the familiar materials he uses to make his work—found objects, like plastic buckets and cheap chairs, fluorescent and rope lights—the initial emotional response slowly gives way to a realization that there is much more at stake than mere effect. Peters offers us the opportunity to question the very basis of our existence and the laws that govern the functioning of our world, while celebrating its wonder and beauty. However, the artist's engagement with visual puzzles and philosophical conundrums is balanced by his eagerness to draw viewers outside themselves by inspiring genuine pleasure and wonder. The common materials he uses offer the comfort of familiarity to balance the phenomenological challenges he presents. As serious as his work is, Peters never fully abandons a sense of fun and play, using his materials like Tinkertoys or Lincoln Logs, a kit of spare parts with possibilities as limitless as the imagination.

- Elizabeth Grady

Curator and Critic Elizabeth Grady is the Director of Kunsthalle Galapagos (opening Fall 2010), adjunct professor of Art History at the Fashion Institute of Technology (State University of New York), and special assistant to the Estate of Diane Arbus.



Jason Peters (1977-)

Born in Mobile, Alabama, United States
Raised in Munich, Germany
Lives and works in Brooklyn, New York

Education

1995-1999 Maryland Institute College of Art,
Baltimore, MD Bachelor of Fine Arts in Sculpture
and a Minor in Asian Art History

Grants

2010 Sculpture Space, Utica, NY
2009 Salina Art Center, Salina, KS
2007 Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts, Omaha, NE
2006 Mattress Factory, Pittsburg, PA

Solo Exhibitions

2010 *JASON PETERS: Anti.Gravity.Material.Light*,
Oklahoma City Museum of Art, Oklahoma City, OK,
Curator Glen Gentele
2009 *Now You See It, Now You Don't*, Times Square
Alliance, New York, NY
2009 *Open And as Pointed as Possible*, Salina Art
Center, Salina, KS
2008 *Red*, Insect Gallery, Brooklyn, NY,
Curator Alex Eagleton
2008 *In The Way...*, English Kills Gallery, Brooklyn,
NY, Curator Chris Harding
2008 *No more / No less*, White Flag Projects, St. Louis,
MO, Curator Matthew Strauss
2007 *Jason Peters @ Slowdown*, Omaha, NE
2007 *Paleontology*, Robert Berman Gallery, Santa
Monica, CA, Curator ELK
2005 *The Space In-Between*, Supreme Trading,
Brooklyn, NY, Curator Craig Shillitto
2004 *Continually Becoming*, Center for Contemporary
Arts, Santa Fe, NM, Curator Kathleen Hannigin

Group Exhibitions

2009 *Gods of Mars*, English Kills Gallery, Brooklyn,
NY, Curator Chris Harding
2008 *The Light Project*, The Pulitzer Foundation for
the Arts, St. Louis, MO
2008 *IN-SITE*, Sculpture Guild, Governors Island,
NY, Curator Jerelyn Hanrahan
2007 *Wunderkammer*, Institute for Psychoanalytic
Training and Research, New York, NY, Curator
Melanie Jelacic
2007 *Host*, The Soap Factory, Minneapolis, MN,
Curator Elizabeth Grady
2006 *Factory Installed*, Mattress Factory, Pittsburg, PA

2005 *SCOPE*, Micro-Scope, Hamptons, NY, Curators
Mary Mattingly and Paul Middendorf
2005 *WATERWAYS*, Venice, Italy, Lead Curators
Renée Vara and Mary Mattingly
2002 *Barometer*, Cynthia Broan Gallery, New York,
NY, curated by F.I.T. graduate students
1999 *OPTIONS 99*, 9th Biennial Exhibition, Project
Space, Washington, D.C., Curator Victoria Reis

Projects

2009 BROCK ENRIGHT: GOOD TIMES WILL
NEVER BE THE SAME
Directed by Jody Lee Lipes, My role was as performer,
set builder, grip.

Bibliography

2010 Feb. *The Oklahoman*, "Don't Miss' exhibit uses
buckets..." John Bradenburg
2010 Jan. *The Oklahoman*, "Artist creating large
sculptures at site..." Brandy McDonnell
2010 Jan. *The Gazette*, "Perspective-Skewing
OKCMOA..." Jon Wertz
2009 July *New York Post*, "Ugly 'Square' Chairs Pile
Up," James Fanelli
2009 July blog.art21.org, "Inside the Artist's Studio,"
Georgia Kotretsos
2009 May *Salina Journal*, "A.I.R. creates unique
sculptures out of everyday items," Gary Demuth
2008 Nov. *Washington Post*, "Brooklyn's Latest Brush
With Art," Andrea Sachs
2008 Sep. *West End Word*, "Large-scale 'Light Project'
delights, astounds" Dickson Beall
2008 Sep. *St. Louis Beacon*, "The Light Project
illuminates..." Ivy Cooper
2008 Aug. *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, "Light Fantastic,"
David Bonetti
2008 June Review, "Buckets of Light," Elizabeth
Wolfson
2007 Nov. *Omaha World-Herald*, "What is it?,"
David Stickney
2006 July *Vogue Italia*, Fall fashion spread,
Bruce Weber
2006 July *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Mary Thomas
2006 June *Pittsburgh City Paper*, Gregory M. Knepp
2004 Nov. *Santa Fe Reporter*, "Zane's World," Zane
Fischer
2004 Nov. *Santa Fe/North*, "About Art," Tom Collins

Exhibition Checklist

Frailty of Structural Chaos (2010). Chairs,
fluorescent tubes with colored sleeves. Approximate
dimensions: 24' x 12' x 10'

Seduction of a Muse (2010). Red and yellow buckets,
rope lights, aircraft cable. Approximate dimensions:
39' x 19' x 12'

Visceral Paradigm (2010). Mirrors, fluorescent tubes,
Plexiglas ball, black Styrofoam ball. Approximate
dimensions: 37' (furthest point to furthest point),
26' x 24' x 12'

I am All Ways in One (2010). White buckets,
rope lights, mirrors, aircraft cable. Approximate
dimensions: 33 1/2' x 57' x 13 1/2'

Promising Casualty (2010). Red and green buckets,
rope lights, aircraft cable. Approximate dimensions:
11' x 10 1/2' x 15'

Untitled (2009). Collage on paper. Framed: 32 x 40 in.

Untitled (2009). Collage on paper. Framed: 32 x 40 in.

Untitled (2009). Ink on paper. Framed: 22 x 28 in.

Untitled (2009). Ink on paper. Framed: 22 x 28 in.

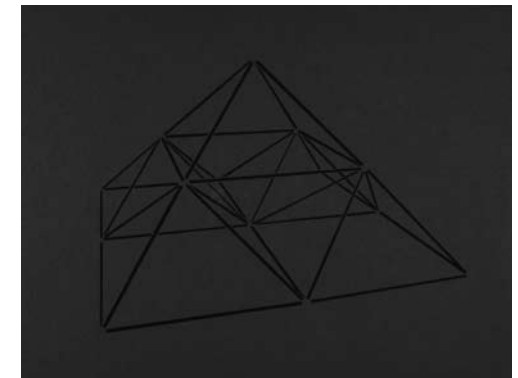
Untitled (2009). 15 paper cutouts. 12 framed, each:
19 x 25 in.; 3 framed, each: 25 x 19 in.

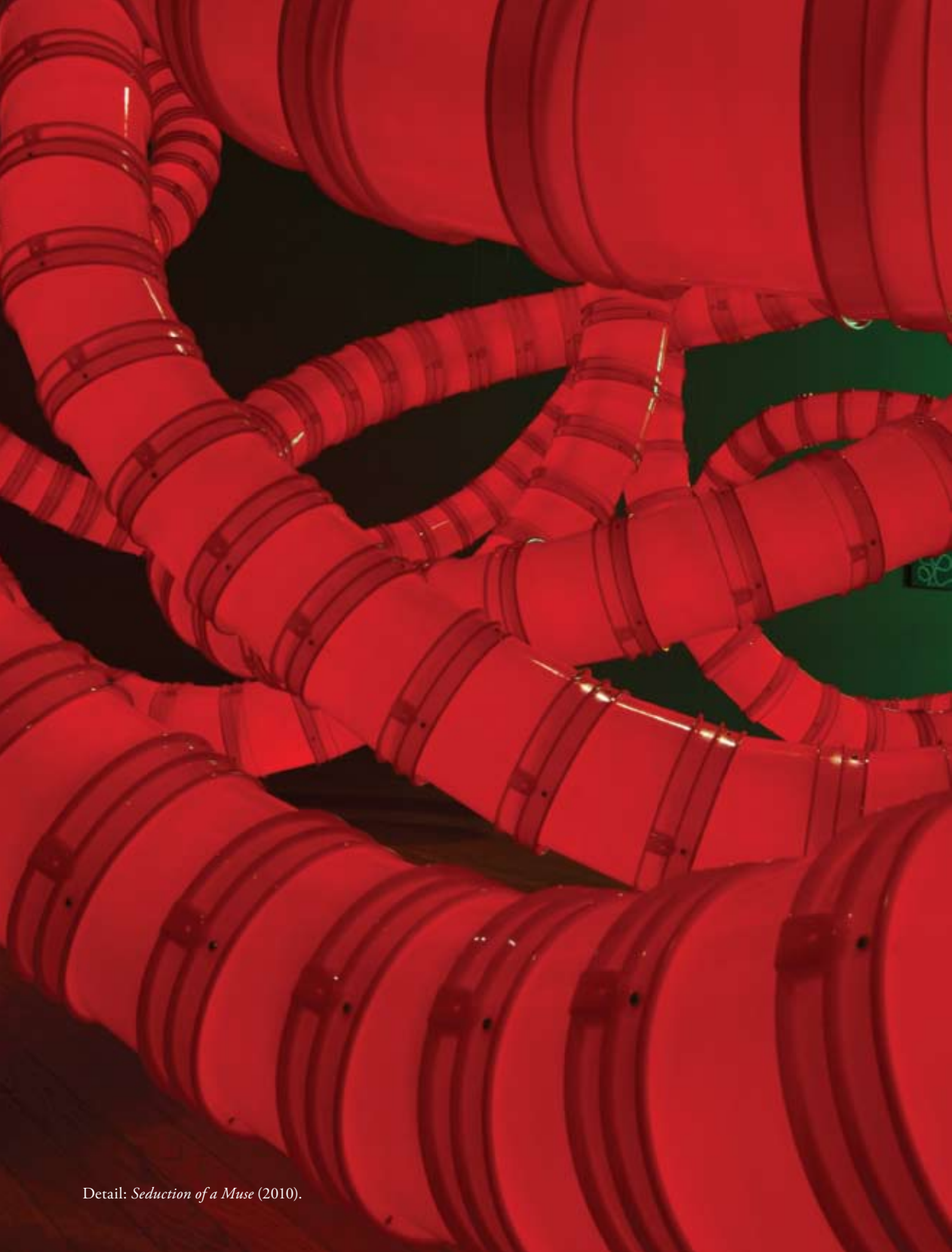
Untitled (2009). 3 paper cutouts. 2 framed, each: 12
1/2 x 19 in.; 1 framed: 25 x 19 in.

Untitled (2009). Marker on paper. Framed: 32 x 40 in.

Untitled (2009). Pencil on paper. Framed: 40 x 32 in.

Untitled (2009). Pencil on paper. Framed: 40 x 32 in.





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