



THE FORTRESS

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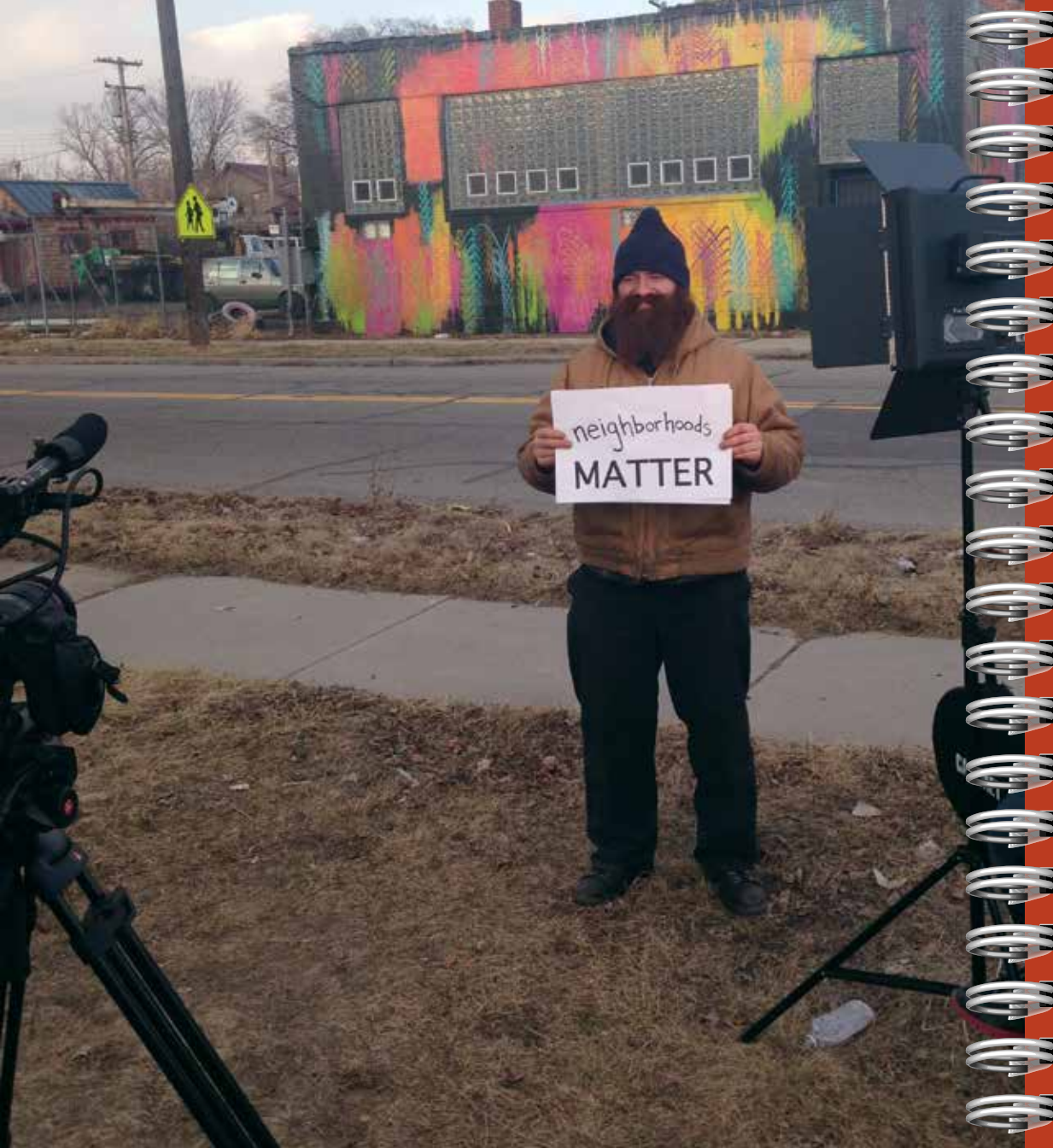
Steven Kuypers and Steven McShane



MARCH 7 – APRIL 5, 2015

CURATED BY DICK GOODY

OAKLAND UNIVERSITY
**ART
GALLERY**



The photographs in this catalog document the day-to-day activities at **The** Fortress Studios as well as its artist residency program. They also depict Steven Kuypers' and Steven McShane's collaborative sculptural installations at the Oakland University Art Gallery during March of 2015.





The Fortress

Detroit, poised post-bankruptcy to reinvent itself from its rustbelt behemoth past towards a post-industrial center for diversity and creativity, is at a historical crossroads. The fact that Steven Kuypers and Steven McShane formed a partnership, acquired a large enough real estate complex in which to operate a production facility, and successfully tracked down the necessary machinery and equipment for its realization could really have only happened right here, right now. Anywhere else in the world it would be hard to imagine.

I lean toward sculpture because it inhabits the same space as the viewer. Whether it's an object or sound or performance, it is a way to create moments in the viewer's life as opposed to representing something from another time.

— Steven Kuypers

I come from a crafts background so I am forced to deal with three dimensions by working with metal.

— Steven McShane

Ones initial encounter at [the](#) Fortress Studios will invariably be one of witnessing labor in action. There are no effete pretensions to be found anywhere within the sprawling compound, which lies fenced in off East Grand Boulevard, only a few blocks from the old General Motors world headquarters. Your first meeting with them (they in their overalls) might take place leaning against the back of an old pickup truck. It's going to be a short meeting because, to be honest, you're keeping them from their work. But you'll be given the tour because they are extremely proud of their facilities and equipment. And rightly so, because it's a wonder how they amassed so much extraordinary technology and equipment. Statuesque McShane has the warm air of a blacksmith. Kuypers is leaner with, ironically, at once a lively inquisitiveness, and yet an acute reserve.

The biggest difference between how we approach making work is the stepping off point. McShane has a craft background so his ideas always start with material, from working with steel and expand from there. While Kuypers comes from a Fine Art background so the ideas always precede the material selection. Both are equally concerned with craftsmanship and concept. In general though we don't concern ourselves much with how or what form the final work takes. We are more concerned with whether or not it is meaningful.

— The Steves

They call themselves *The Steves*. This identity, this moniker, could lead to the interpretive assumption that Steven Kuypers and Steven McShane share a brain. True, they are partners and Fortress Studios LLC is their business. Kuypers is the more conceptual of the two artists, McShane more the master craftsman. What they have most in common is their passion for the challenge of making meaningful three-dimensional work.

A simplification: anything that Kuypers can think up, McShane can build. Yet this line of thought does not reveal their substantive desire to work together, their equality or the powerful bond which cements their partnership. Above all, McShane is a solver whose metalsmithing and jewelry-making background furnish him with the ideal and agile expertise to make works ranging from the minute to the massive in practically any material. Either he will be crouched over a tiny flame melting precious metal or suspended high above the ground, on a crane, welding steel plates together. Kuypers, on the other hand, creates problems to be solved; often his objects have working parts: levers, buttons, flashing lights and screens, which engage and encourage relational interaction.

To manufacture this array of work — intricate or colossal — psychological or quizzical — requires planning, experimentation, ambition, intimate knowledge of the limits of particular materials, and the ability to use technology and machinery necessary for their craftsmanship, to be able to ultimately overcome all the technical obstacles. They like a challenge. The partnership of these two gifted artists is dependent on their trust in one another, which is indelible, and their obsessive acquisitiveness.





They love tracking down and procuring new (or used) equipment and technologies. And it is this — the equipment, the material — which makes the partnership work. Fortress Studios is a production line that pays its way.

The Steves are the product of a post-structural world. Modernity is a construct for which they have little affinity (unless hired to complete another's modular steel sculpture). Yet, actually, what is happening within the Fortress has the hallmark of Metamodernism because it is timeless: people working with materials, understanding their properties, and manipulating them into new forms. This goes across generations, culture, and in the 21st century, across gender. The high level of craft in their oeuvres and its technical acuity separates it from contemporary art of a more spontaneous and gimcrack type. Paradoxically, while a portion of their work is project-based ephemera, ironically it all looks as if it were built to last forever.

The entrance into the brick fortress leads to a labyrinthine warren of studios for visiting artists completing residencies. Everyone inside is working at full tilt — at computers, processing materials, solving problems. Then, towards the rear, is a small factory comprising a woodworking shop, metalworking shop, foundry and an intermediary area where new technologies and materials are sandwiched between the two older disciplines. Aromas of carbon, sawdust, epoxy and flux permeate. Outside, in the fresh air, on the edge of the compound is a large kiln, and all around crammed to the gunnels, is machinery — cranes, pulleys, hydraulics, platforms, scaffolding and various vehicles. In addition, you find their artworks in various stages of fruition, whether commissioned by a third party or in the process of assembly for the next exhibition.

And this is the next exhibition: a backhoe, sauna and a curious looking moving object, which is the antithesis of Jean Tinguely, but nevertheless, kinetically reminiscent of his sculpture. A Detroit show for sure; this is a contemporary moment: project-based art that is reflective of a city rebuilding itself. Each object is a metonym and metaphor for the strength, perseverance, commitment and consolation of getting the job done. This city requires these attributes of its artists. It makes them stay and work things out. It gives succor.

Detroit is everything to us. We both thrive in urban atmospheres but also need the freedom to build a space to make our work. Detroit is the only place where we would be able to do what we are doing.

— The Steves



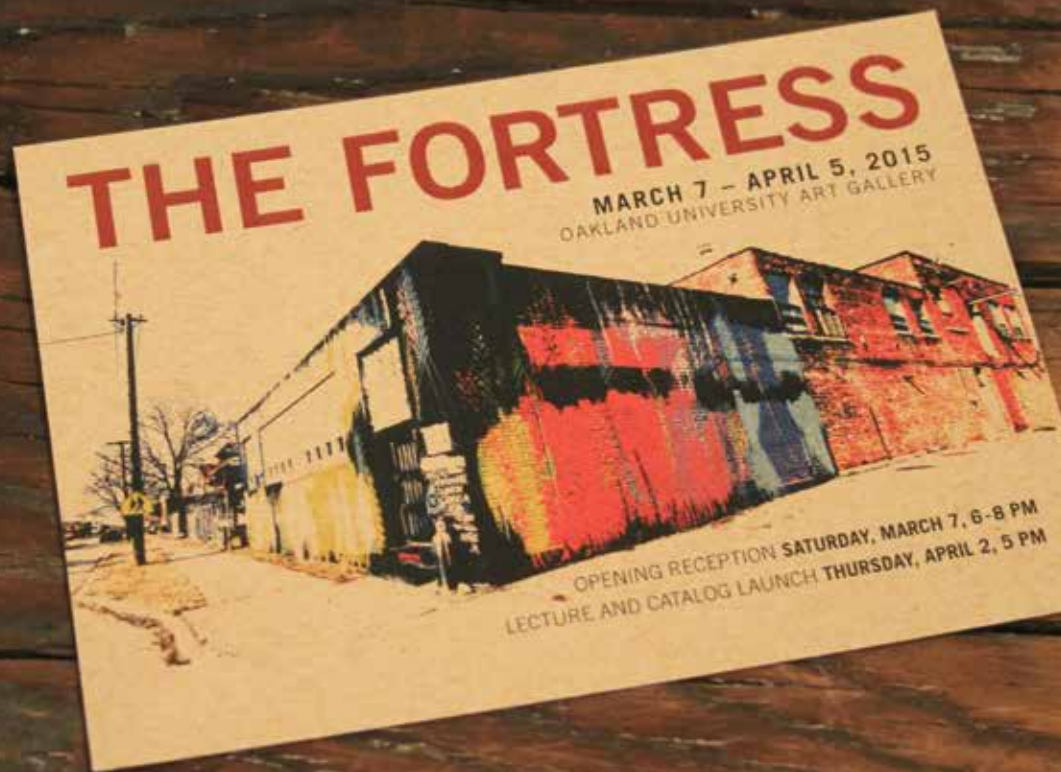
The work here was made specifically for this gallery/exhibition. Once activated in its new environment (out of the studio), a new context emerges encouraging agency and new relational and material possibilities for the work. One of the objects is a functioning sauna, but non-functional in situ because activated, it would set off smoke alarms. After the end of the exhibition, it will be installed at the Fortress to be fully made use of. While on exhibition, its dormancy renders its palpable potentiality.

The spectacle of project-based art resonates because of its short lifespan, but, also, paradoxically, The Steves make objects that can stand the test of time because of the resilience of their fabrication. These works are worthy of a longer life. The backhoe, for example, a massive ephemeral vehicle made of *objet trouvé* fragments is a stand-in for the real backhoe that they have not yet managed to acquire, but which is at the top of their wish list. In short, it is an incantation, as potent as the real thing. One could almost imagine a standoff between the genuine item and its metonym. The artwork does not weaken from the strain of its signification. Its signification is philosophical — as Kant might have alluded, its purposelessness justifies its aesthetic existence.

We both see the value in having vast understanding of various techniques to manipulate material. It's nice knowing that whatever your idea, you're not technically limited in methods or means to make it reality. The Fortress allows us space to indulge our curiosity in how things are made outside of our work. Being surrounded by knowledgeable creative people also helps drive our own practices. We are also content to gather as much equipment as possible to help support ourselves and others.

Kuypers and McShane, like Popp's Packing up the road, are here to stay. After almost a decade, the Fortress is part of the fabric of this community. Each month it hosts an open house where the neighborhood can participate in art-related activities. The influx of visiting artists from around the world bring with them fresh global perspectives. The Fortress is a beacon, a nexus for contemporary art in Detroit and the values of labor, craftsmanship, and the production it supports.

Dick Goody, March 2015



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THE FORTRESS

The Fortress is a complex of workshops and residency studio spaces in North End, Detroit, which has been operated by artists Steven Kuypers and Steven McShane for almost a decade. This exhibition explores their collaborative partnership. Their work encompasses the use of traditional and experimental materials and techniques, and the aesthetics of social and relational sculptural practices. The Fortress is a nexus for contemporary art in Detroit and the values of labor, craftsmanship, community involvement and the production it supports.



AFTER CLOSING GATES - THIS IS WHAT THE
BACK LOOKS LIKE CAN GO ING A SINGLE
OPENING

The Fortress Archive, 2015
objets trouvés, shelves

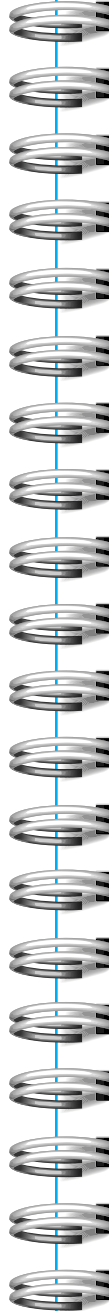


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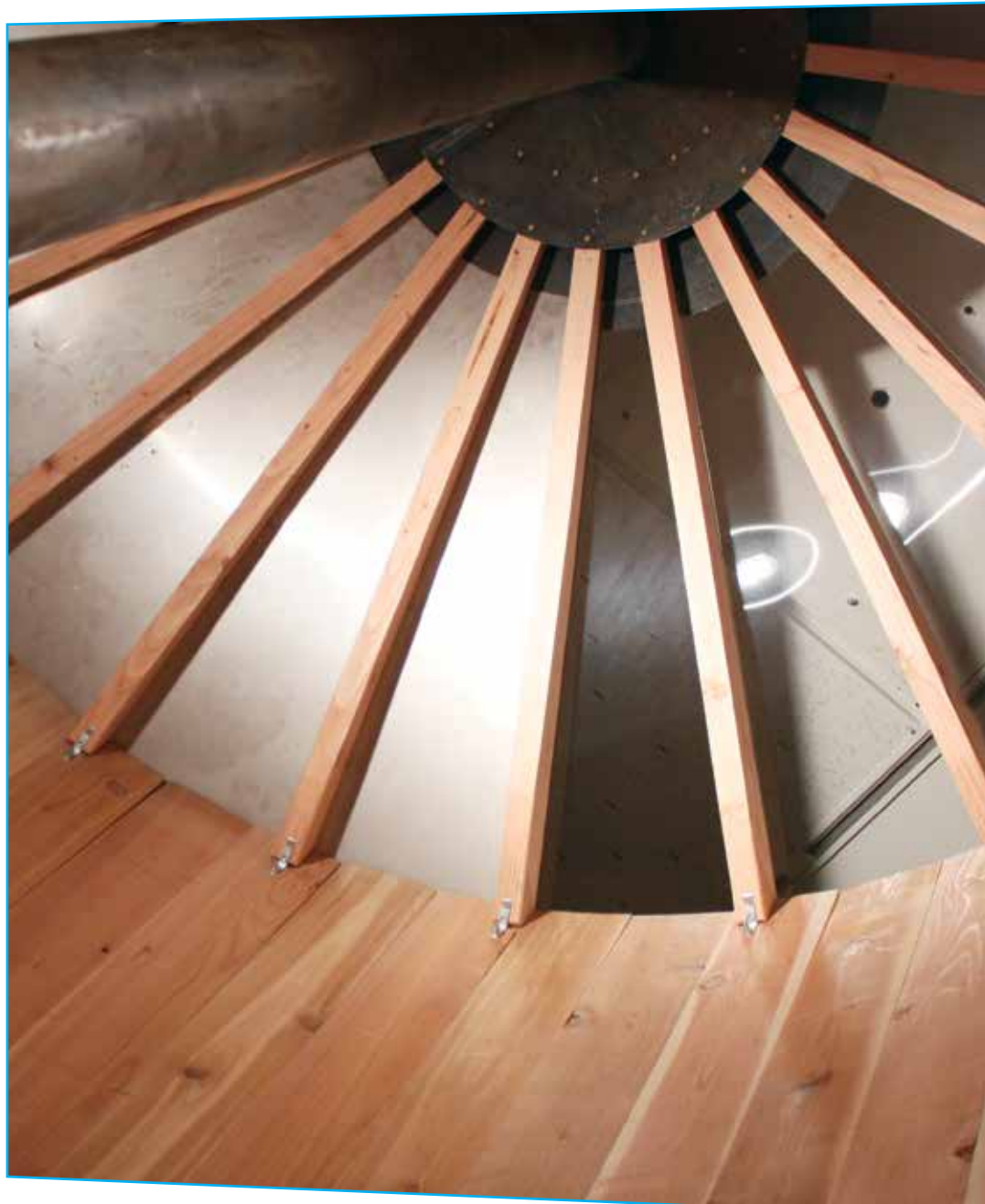
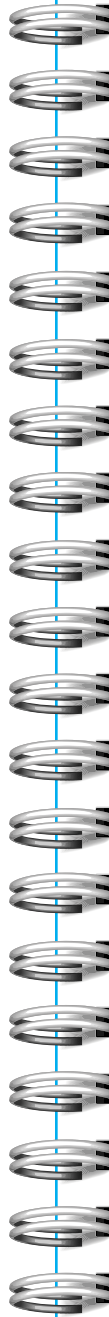


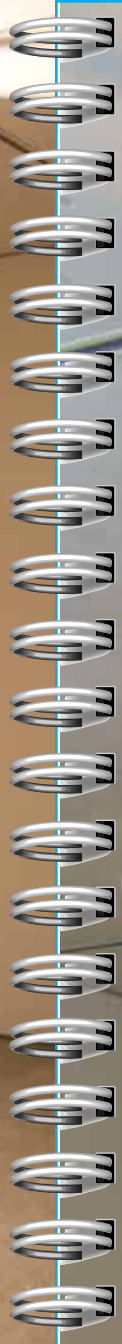
AFTER CLOSING GATES - THIS IS WHAT THE
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Sauna Tower, 2015
cedar, wire, steel, Plexiglass



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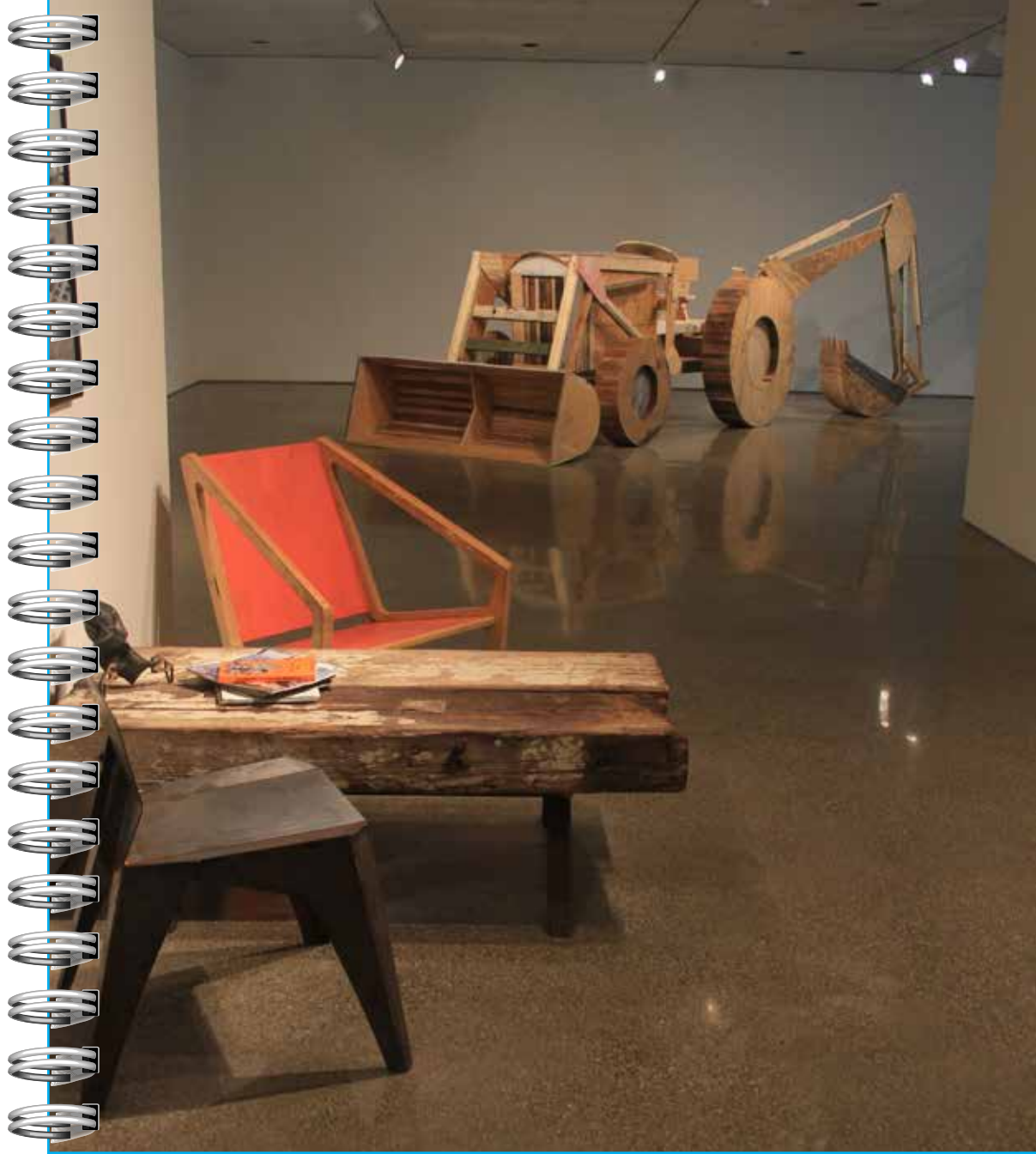


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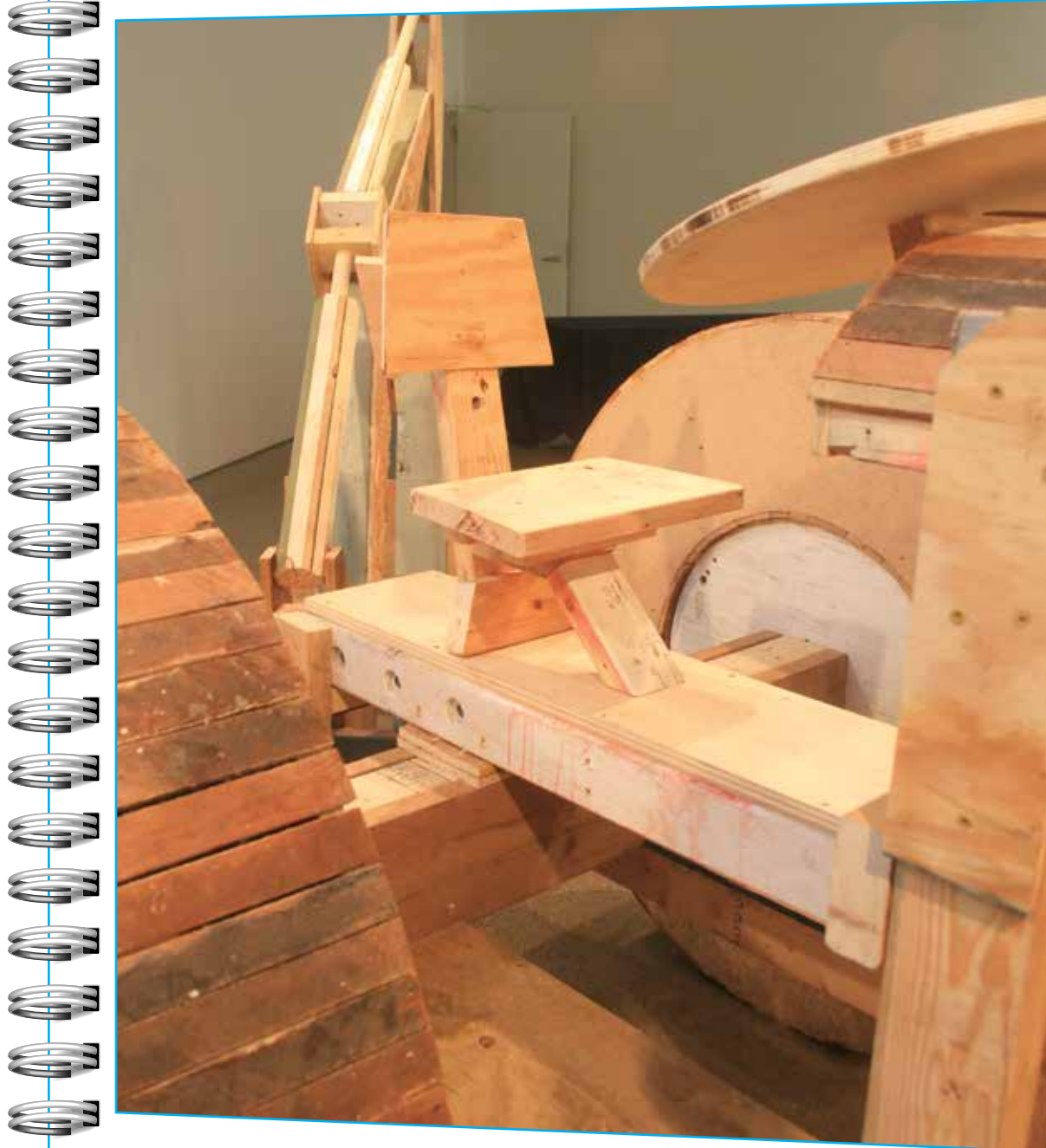


AFTER CLOSING GATES - THIS IS WHAT THE
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Reclaimed Tractor, 2015
wood



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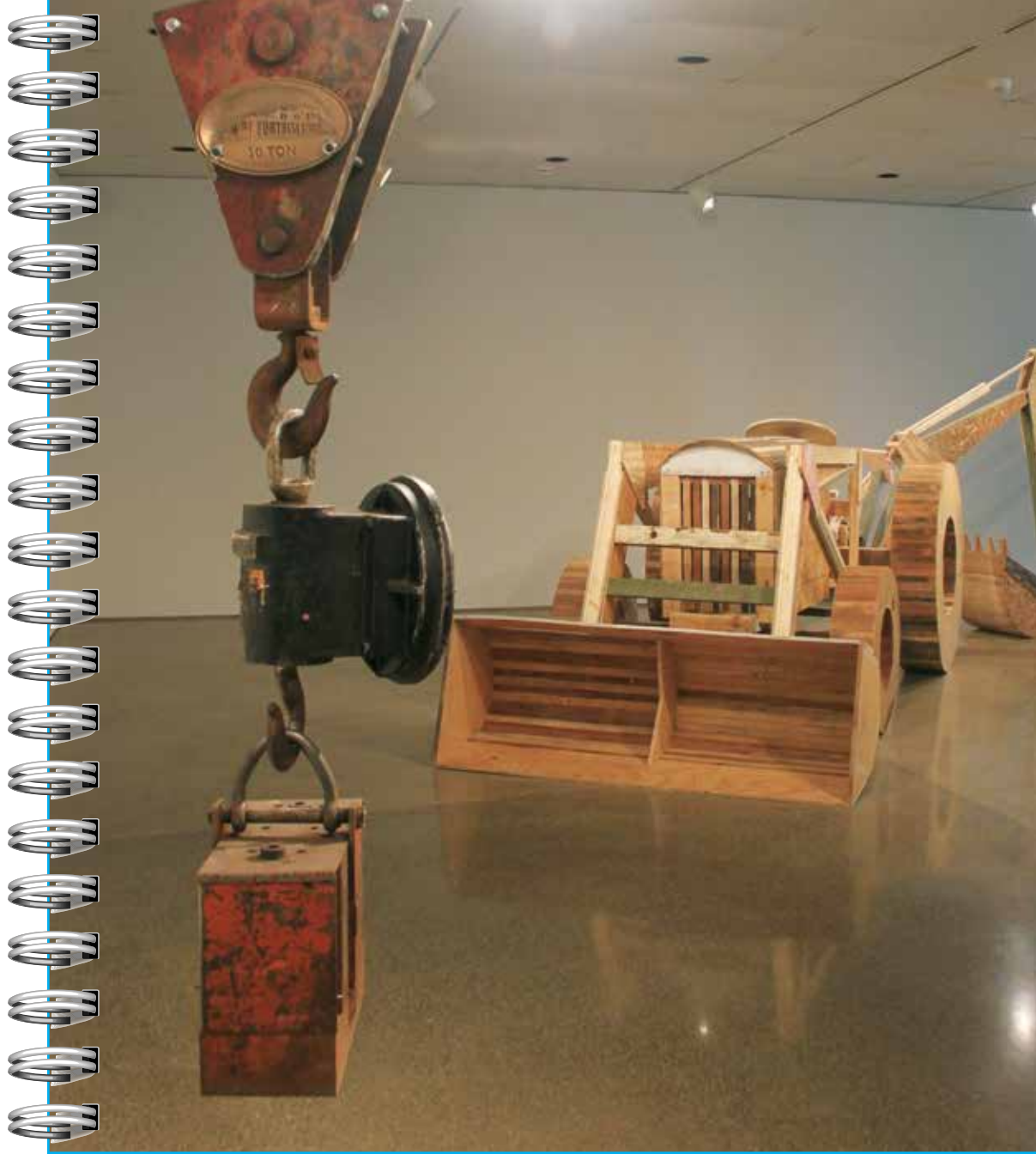


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AFTER CLOSING GATES - THIS IS WHAT THE
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Can You Lift It? 2015
electromagnet, winch, scale



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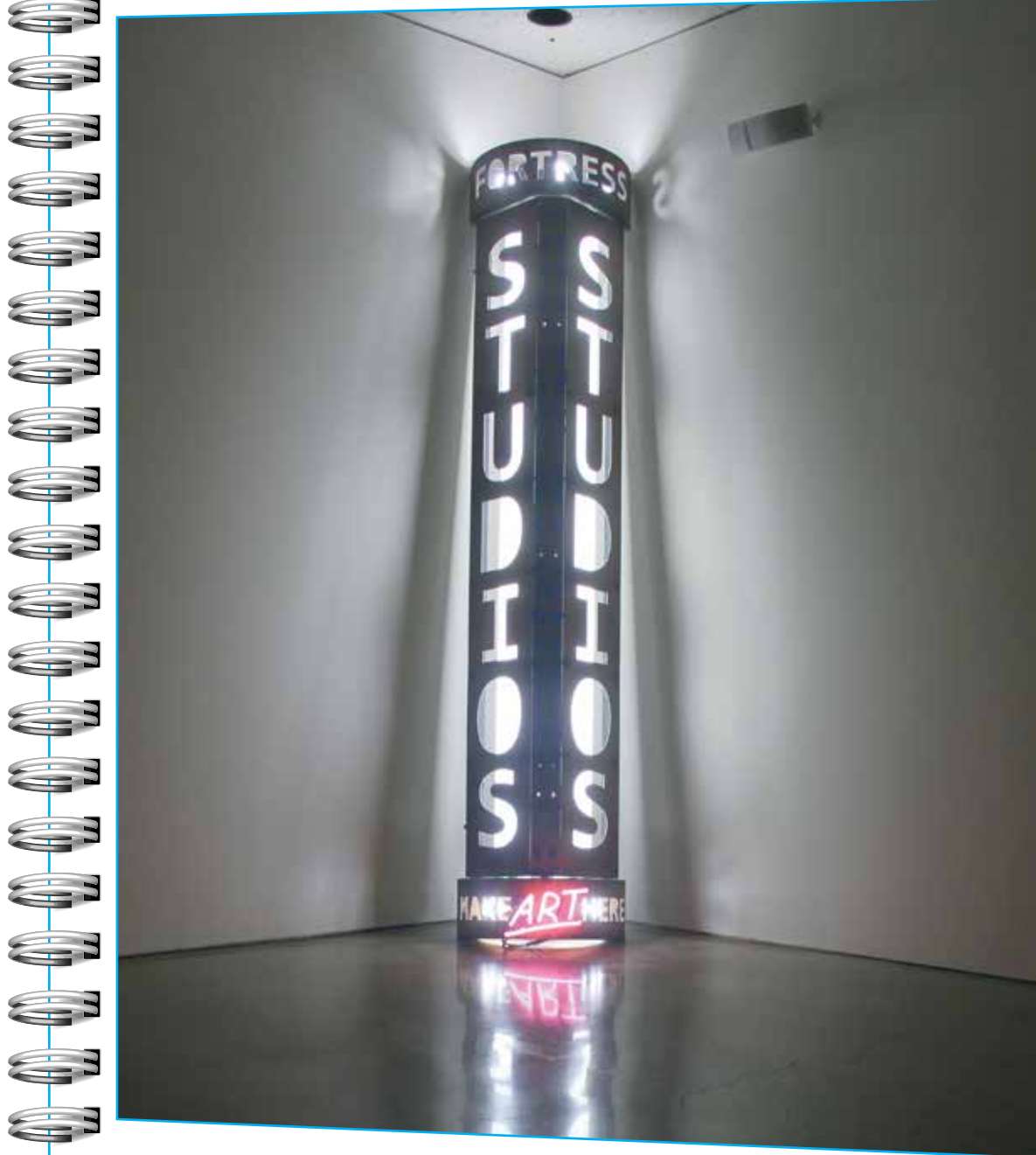


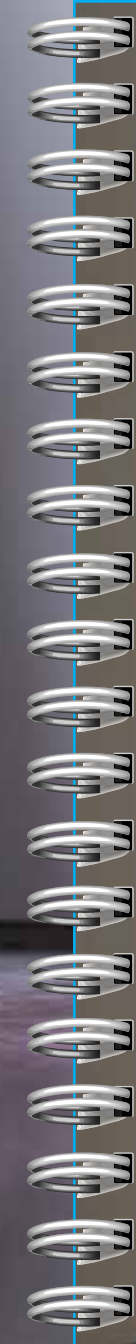
AFTER CLOSING GATES - THIS IS WHAT THE
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Fortress Sign, 2015
steel, neon, fluorescent tubes, LED lights

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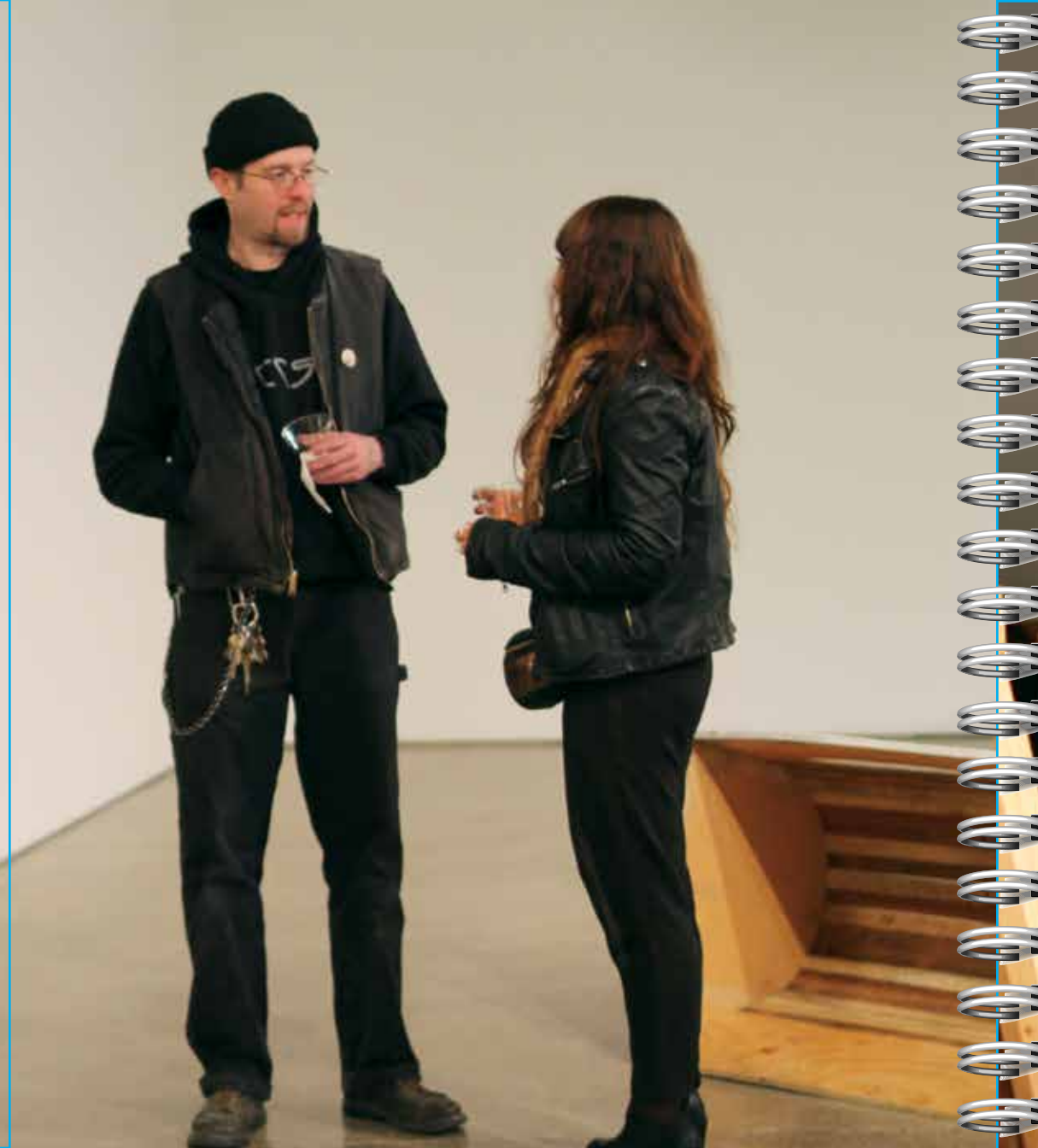
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They would be split apart 1/2 images on one
flap - half on other





ALTERNATIVE - CAN TAKE THIS ONE UP TO
3 PANEL

this is 124% - Can go to 130%
(@300DPI) - IF PHOTO IS HIGH
QUAILTY FOR PRINT



AFTER CLOSING GATES - THIS IS WHAT THE
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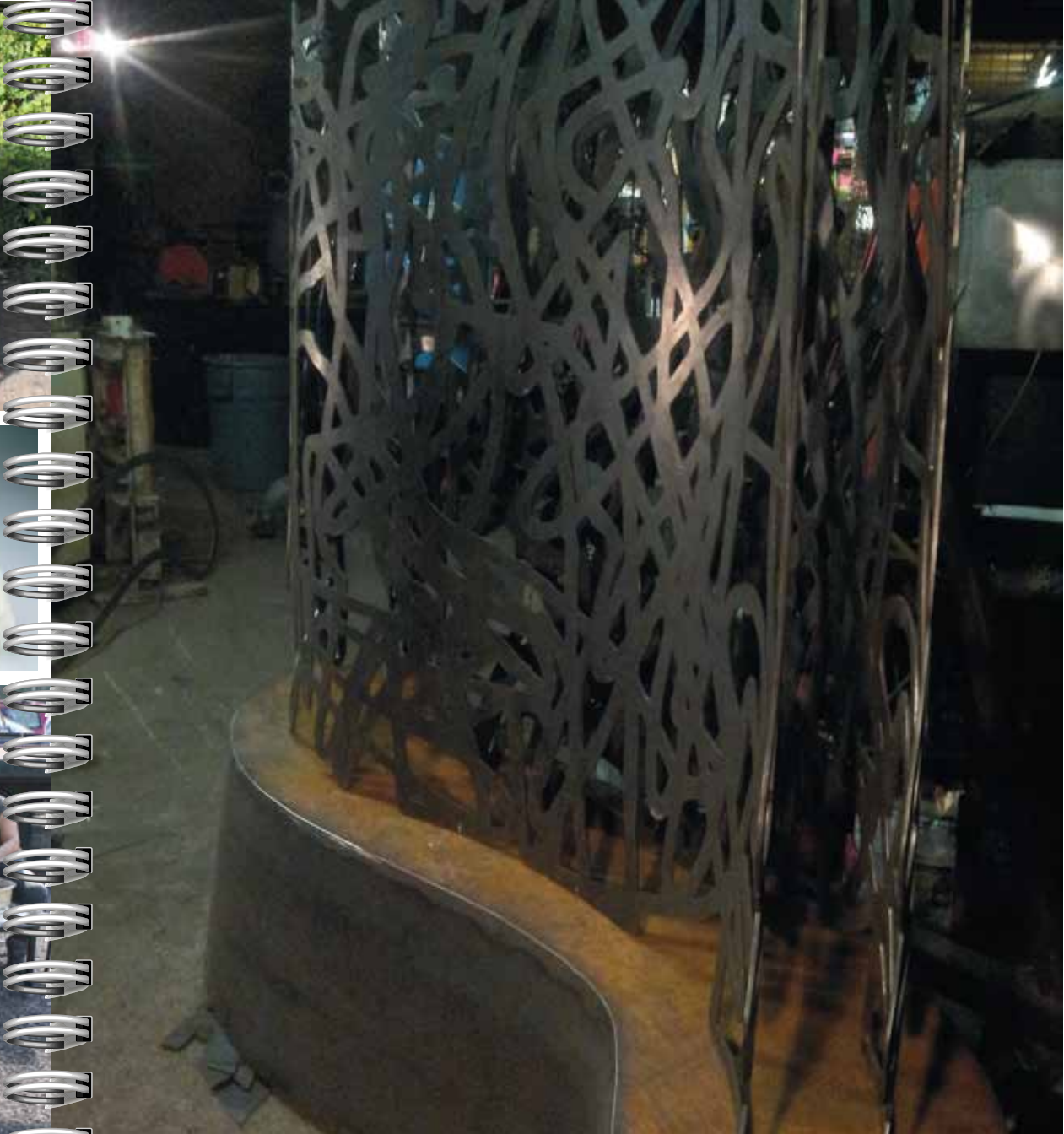




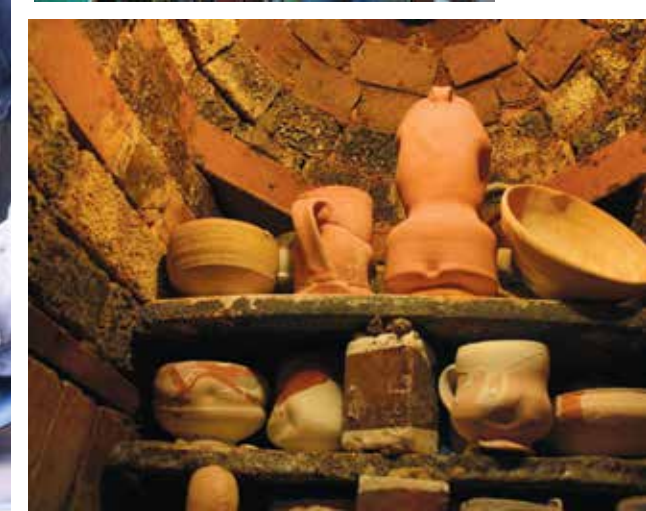
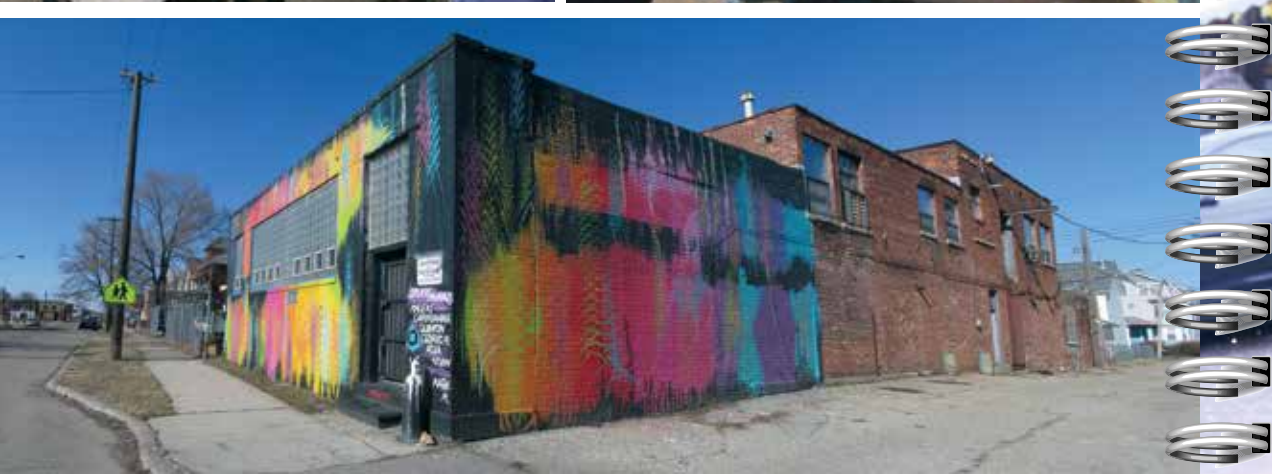
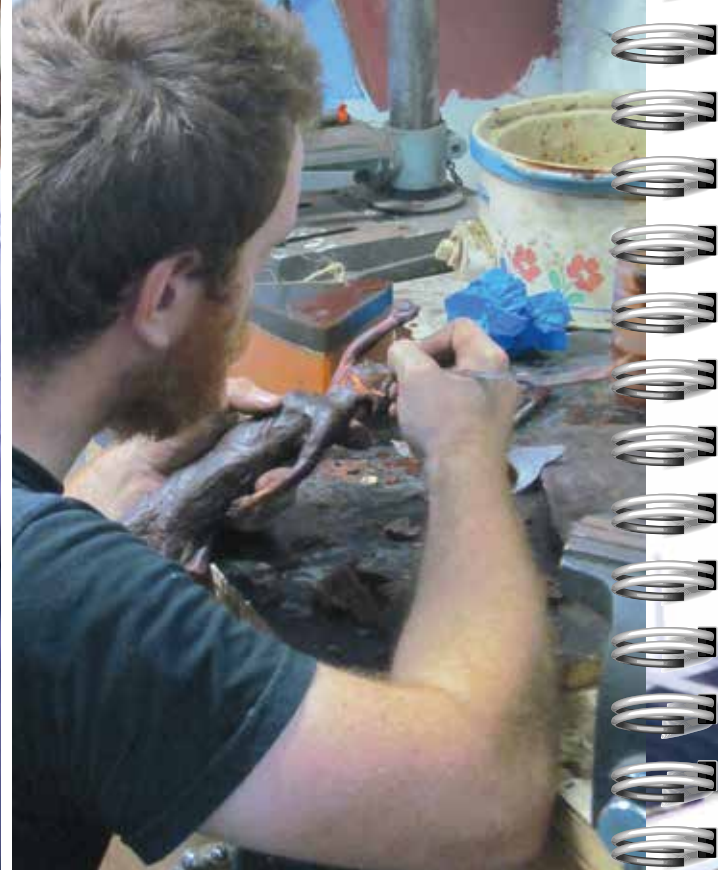
















Steven Kuypers

EXHIBITIONS

XXXX *Smoke and Mirror*, Cave Gallery, Detroit, 2010 (solo exhibition)

2013 *Chosen*, Detroit Artist Market, Detroit, Michigan

2012 *Intern and Emerging Artist Exhibition*, Salem Art Works, Salem, New York
DAM Annual All Media Exhibition, Detroit Artists Market, Michigan

2011 *Resistance is Futile*, Popp's Packing, Hamtramck, Michigan
Oil & Water, Gallery Project, Ann Arbor, Michigan
Pop Up Detroit Art Exhibition, Sugarhill Lofts, Detroit, Michigan
ReVIEW CCS Alumni Selections, Detroit, Michigan

2010 *In the Making of the Moment*, Macomb Center for the Performing Arts, Clinton Township, Michigan
Franconia Sculpture Park, Shafer, Minnesota

2009 *Stumps vs. Pedestal*, Ox-Bow School of Art, Saugatuck, Michigan
Ground Control, Russell Industrial Center, Detroit, Michigan
DAM Annual Scholarship Awards and Exhibition, Detroit Artist Market, Detroit Michigan

2008 *Step Right Up!* Gallery Project, Ann Arbor Michigan
Outdated Polaroid Show, Country Club Chicago Gallery, Chicago, Illinois

Steven McShane

EXHIBITIONS

2012 *Menage*, N'Namdi Gallery, Detroit, Michigan
Pour, Starkweather Art Center, Romeo, Michigan
New Departures and Transitions, N'Namdi Gallery, Detroit, Michigan
Committee Selects Show, Detroit Artist Market, Detroit, Michigan

2011 *Dam Design Show*, Detroit Artist Market, Detroit, Michigan
Oil & Water, Gallery Project, Ann Arbor, Michigan
Pop Up Detroit Art Exhibition, Sugarhill Lofts, Detroit, Michigan

2010 *Warp*, Gallery Project, Ann Arbor, Michigan
Detroit's Most Wanted, U245 Gallery, Detroit, Michigan
All Media Exhibition, Detroit Artist Market, Detroit, Michigan

2009 *Spring Happening*, Next Step Gallery & Studio, Ferndale, Michigan
College for Creative Studies, Student Exhibition, CCS, Detroit, Michigan
Noel Night, CCS, Detroit, Michigan

Steven Kuypers and Steven McShane

The Steve Show, Corktown Studios, Detroit, Michigan, 2013

Bearing (T.A.G.A.),





Acknowledgements

Steven Kuypers and Steven McShane of Fortress Studios would like to thank all past and present resident artists. We would not be where we are today without their continued participation.

Thank you to Jeff Hocking for laying the ground work at 7332 Oakland St. and making it possible for us to grow our own space. For this show in particular, we would like to thank George Vidas, Scott Berels, and everyone else who helped us in the last week of preparation. Thanks to Dick Goody for touring the space last fall and approaching us with this idea of a Fortress-themed exhibition. Lastly, thanks to our families who are supportive and understanding, allowing us the freedoms needed to follow our passions.



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