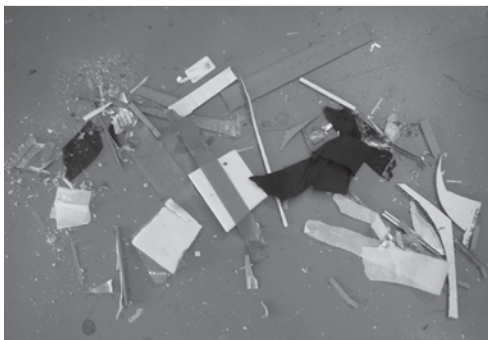
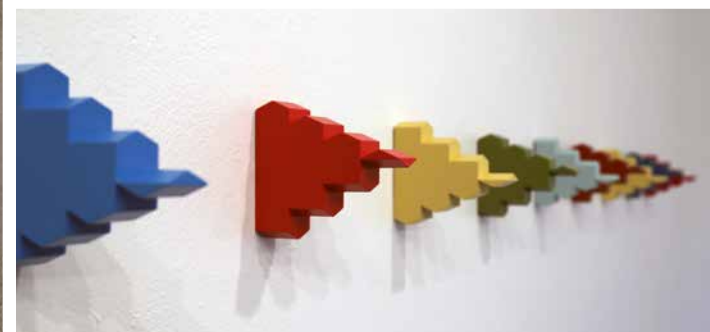
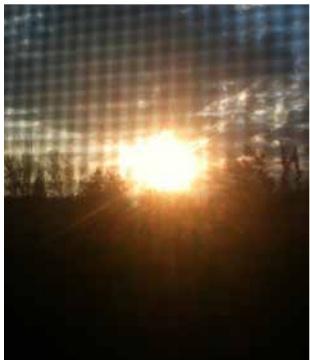


CODY VANDERKAAY

TERRESTRIAL CELESTIAL

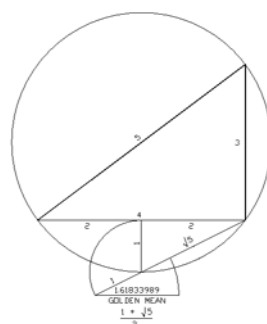
OAKLAND UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY







Ball Drop (*detail*), 2017
Mixed-media and plywood
8 x 24 ft.





CODY VANDERKAAY

TERRESTRIAL CELESTIAL

OAKLAND UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY CURATED BY DICK GOODY

Terrestrial/Celestial: Cody VanderKaay

The traces left by Cody VanderKaay's oeuvre do not so much reach backward to an initial idea; rather the lineage beams forward into subsequent potentialities. Therefore, to understand his work is to see it as an expanding network.

By their nature, networks have hotspots: areas afire like over-stimulated synapses. Yet some quieter networks are narrower passages — sidings where smaller objects are parked in stasis. The true path, the one that constructs the greater network, usually leads to larger works involving pluralistic materials and ideologies, and it is important to know that these are sampled ideologies, because VanderKaay's greatest preoccupation is to advance contemplation into new areas of discovery.

At his most utilitarian, he cites Tony Feher as an important influence. Feher's adapted ready-mades and repetitious amalgams, as well as his low-tech riffing upon Haim Steinbach's shelf pieces, inspire VanderKaay, particularly when he has a desire to go back to basics and reconsider "low-end" aesthetics and recycled mass-produced materials like paint cans, milk crates or plastic bottles.

To further understand VanderKaay's mindset, one needs to be attuned to his contemporary taxonomic sensibilities and proclivities. Gabriel Orozco's smaller works, placed on tables in their latent halfway house status between studio and exhibition space, immediately come to mind. Eva Hesse's smaller works, balanced on a shelf, teetering between fraught existence and their ultimate vulnerability, are another placeholder. More stridently, VanderKaay's larger, fully realized works share the same air as Rachel Whiteread's massive concrete sculptures, or alternatively, Allan McCollum's phalanxes of like-minded, yet uniquely fashioned, objects.

VanderKaay also offers up the names of two seminal 20th-century painters. Piet Mondrian and Ilya Bolotowsky are important antecedents, the former on account of his deeply spiritual neoplasticism, and the latter because of his precise geometric compositions, which in themselves were deeply influenced by Mondrian and De Stijl. Both artists embody a purist aesthetic agenda and provide VanderKaay with a strong connection to the grid of Modernism. Yet this would be but one leg of a platonic table. Another would be skepticism and censure. A third embraces metaphysics. And the last might be described as Zen-inflected craftsmanship.

The table is a subtle metaphor. If such a table existed, it would be neither rickety nor indestructible and embrace both Romanticism and Classicism. Presently, though, there is no one particular table in situ; the artist has a quasi-nomadic practice, on the move, working in several spaces simultaneously: a subterranean garage, fabrication lounge, his office, his car, on the sofa of his family's home.

Sculptors tend to be collaborative. In the past, he has made work occasionally with Atlanta-based artist Rusty Wallace under the moniker "Vespucci" (most recently: Interior/Exterior: Structural Constellations, Athens Institute for Contemporary Art, Athens, Georgia, 2014, curated by Tatiana Veneruso). But other than that, VanderKaay stridently and mercurially aspires to work alone.

Most of his smaller works are metonyms, grounded in the functionality of their iconic depictions (houses, paint cans, gewgaws), but the larger, more ambitious works, grounded in the precedent of their smaller studies, possess an air of inscrutability, metaphor and flight.

One overarching force in his work spanning across his studio practice is what he calls "house maintenance." The German word for this is hauswartung. In other words, he equates the ethos of his art-making as existing in parallel with the mechanical domestic architectural upkeep that he has undertaken sequentially in the serial renovation of his living spaces.

Manifestations of this bricolage are his *Transposed Houses* collages, *Western Ziggurat* sculptures, and, particularly, his *Grey Series* basswood maquettes with their domestically-inflected titles like "Room with a View" and "Happyland Meeting Place." These enchantingly delicate miniature works are reminiscent of Anthony Caro's metal sculptures from the early 1960s. In his section on Caro in the "Art Yearbook 8: Contemporary Sculpture" (1965), Clement Greenberg talks about the "weightlessness" of Caro's forms; the sculptures were assemblages of individual parts and Caro's non-monolithic sculpture had in Greenberg's view " ... sprung from the Cubist collage."

Vanderkaay generates some of his smaller sculptures from his works on paper and an archive of photographic images. These sources imbue the work with specificity and substantiality and provide a strong formalistic framework from which his larger works are launched. At the same time, he argues that, in the end, he works out the models for his best sculptures cerebrally without a blueprint. Ultimately, he insists that the trajectory of his work, particularly his large-scale sculptures, once set on a specific course, is more rooted in metaphysics than in a pragmatic or processed-based studio practice. These works, which may have traceable concrete sources, more importantly have a dimension that relates to spirituality (à la Mondrian) and an interest in the arcane and mythical. Furthermore, he maintains that his curiosity is enriched by the contemplation of a transcendent rationale — for him, idle curiosity without contemplation would be on a par with the merely ornamental.

Having established the relationship between the foundational smaller works and the more expansive larger sculptures, it is worth considering for a moment longer the basswood maquettes from 2014. The artist often works in series, but somehow these small painstakingly rendered, grey-painted constructions have unassailable promise because of their sincere quirky originality and inventiveness. Several antecedents for these come to mind: *Cold Dark Matter: An Exploded View*, 1991, by Cornelia Parker — in the sense that the basswood constructions resonate as possible fragments collected from a catastrophic shanty explosion; like shards from a number of broken pots, these reconstructed objects can never resemble any particular known form, but they strongly suggest a particular culture or materiality. Another reference might be *Black Maria*, 2013, created by Gruppe (a Swiss architectural collective) and Richard Wentworth — the venerable British sculptor whose work influenced the so-called Young British Artists. Actually, there are parallels between VanderKaay and Wentworth — both repurpose objects and explore visual paradoxes. The name *Black Maria* comes from Thomas Edison's *Black Maria* film studio (New Jersey 1893), which was an assortment of ramshackled interconnected

sheds. The maquettes created by Wentworth and Gruppe for *Black Maria* resemble the pre-demolished precursors of VanderKaay's basswood reliefs. The final iteration of *Black Maria*, 2013, was constructed in King's Cross Railway Station, London, and looks like an auditorium where people sit to watch a play that will never transpire because there is no stage; merely there is an empty proscenium. This pun aligns with VanderKaay's quest for the big reveal and the loaded pun.

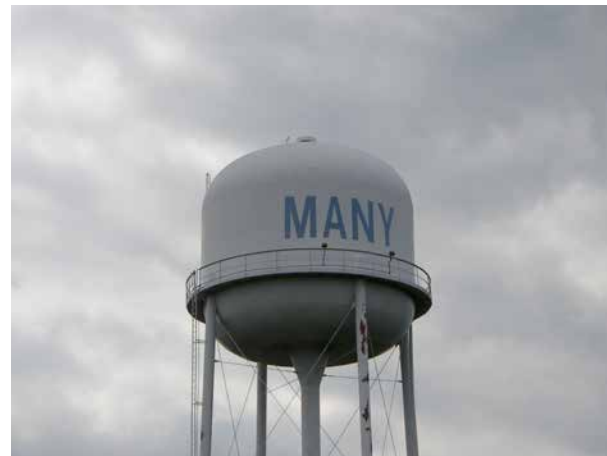
At other moments in this survey exhibition, VanderKaay dwells on the bull's-eye of the transcendental, quite literally by using the mandala form, making inchoate forays into the spiritual. These are cleansing works involving the use of number, astrology, metaphysics, and chance, and they act as punctuations of purification amid his more frenetic activities. One such activity, which is also cyclical, is the fact that prior to the completion of each project, he makes a photograph of the resultant pile of floor sweepings, and he concludes that these assist in closure and act as a memento to the materials and actions he undertook. These actions tie his practice to ritual and foster a ritualistic-driven dimension to his art making.

A shamanistic predilection guides a penchant for the spectacle, but VanderKaay's asceticism moderates his practice, carving a path between these directives. His best works are unencumbered totemic incarnations, which allude to ideologies rather than transmit a concrete credo. Nevertheless, his work has a powerful agnostic pull.

At this point in his career, with a strong network of objects and directives, and a practice grounded in craft and new technologies, this exhibition places him at a frontier where he divides his time between large, fully realized objects and a preoccupation with the seedling works: absurdist, comic, elemental and above all, flirtations with failure and redemption. This is why the exhibition layout has separate passages and divided interests. It mirrors the fragmented psychology of the work and reveals the mystery and experimentation essential to the success of his most developed pieces. It also refracts the different interactions he has with the varied working spaces he uses and the materials he finds at hand in each domain. The denouement or arrival of his best work is the result of a paring down. As each metaphysical aperture opens, it reveals the path ahead, which will be indefatigable and yet infused with the poetic.

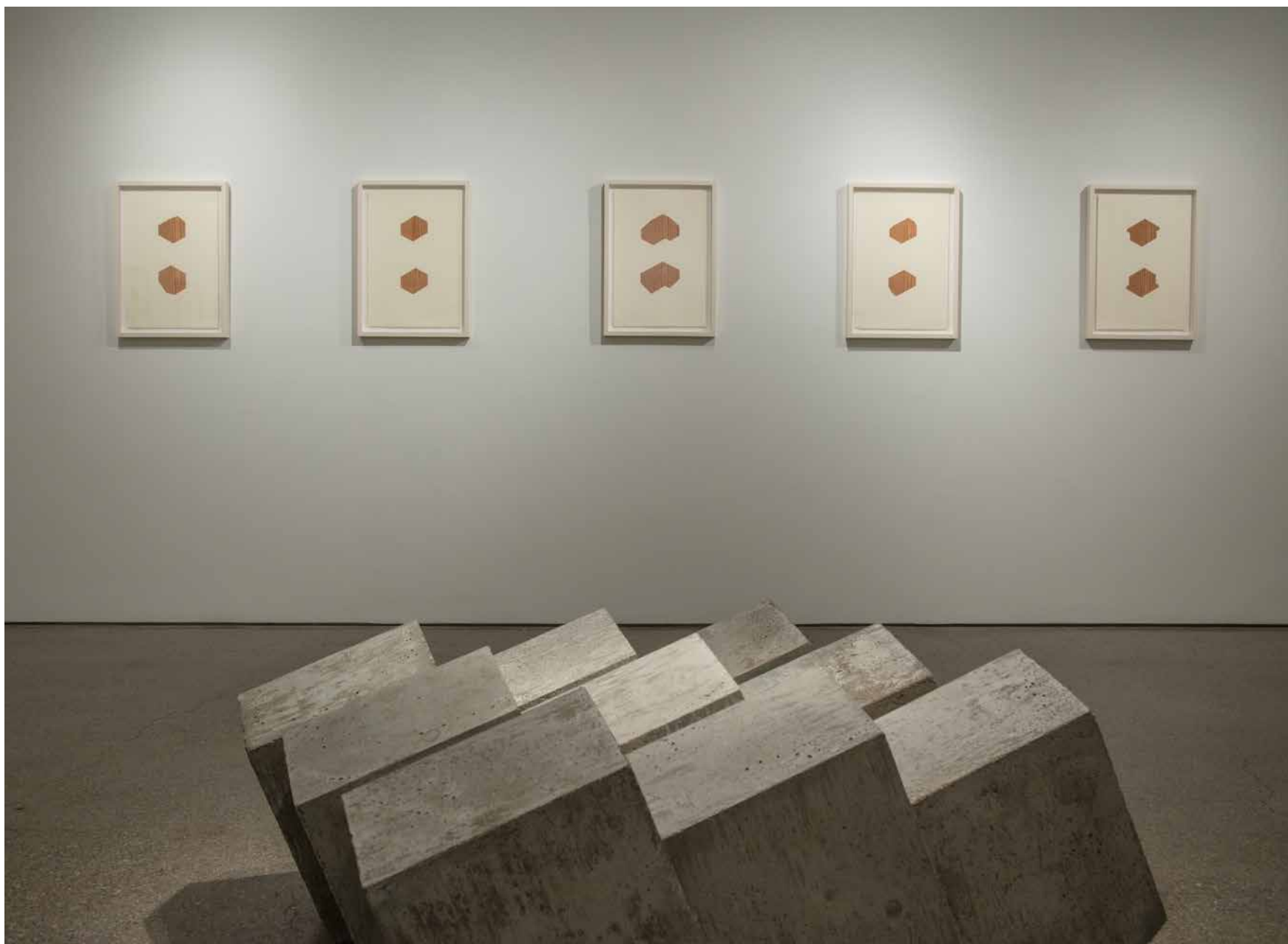
In short, in VanderKaay's oeuvre catholic tastes and their networking interplay are synonymous with the pluralism of Postmodernism, but there is one distinct evolving mission that aligns with the seriousness of Metamodernism, and that is his insistence that in order to be critically ratified his work must possess virtue in all its guises. Anything that does not advance towards integrity stays on the shelf, thwarted. Another roll of the celestial dice, another day of toil and censure is the only means of arriving at the gates of contemplation. Curiosity, repetition and mysticism grounded in the terrestrial: This is the mantra of his practice.

Dick Goody, February 2017





◀
Lodestone, 2017
Mixed-media
81 x 8 x 8 in.



Transposed Houses, 2016

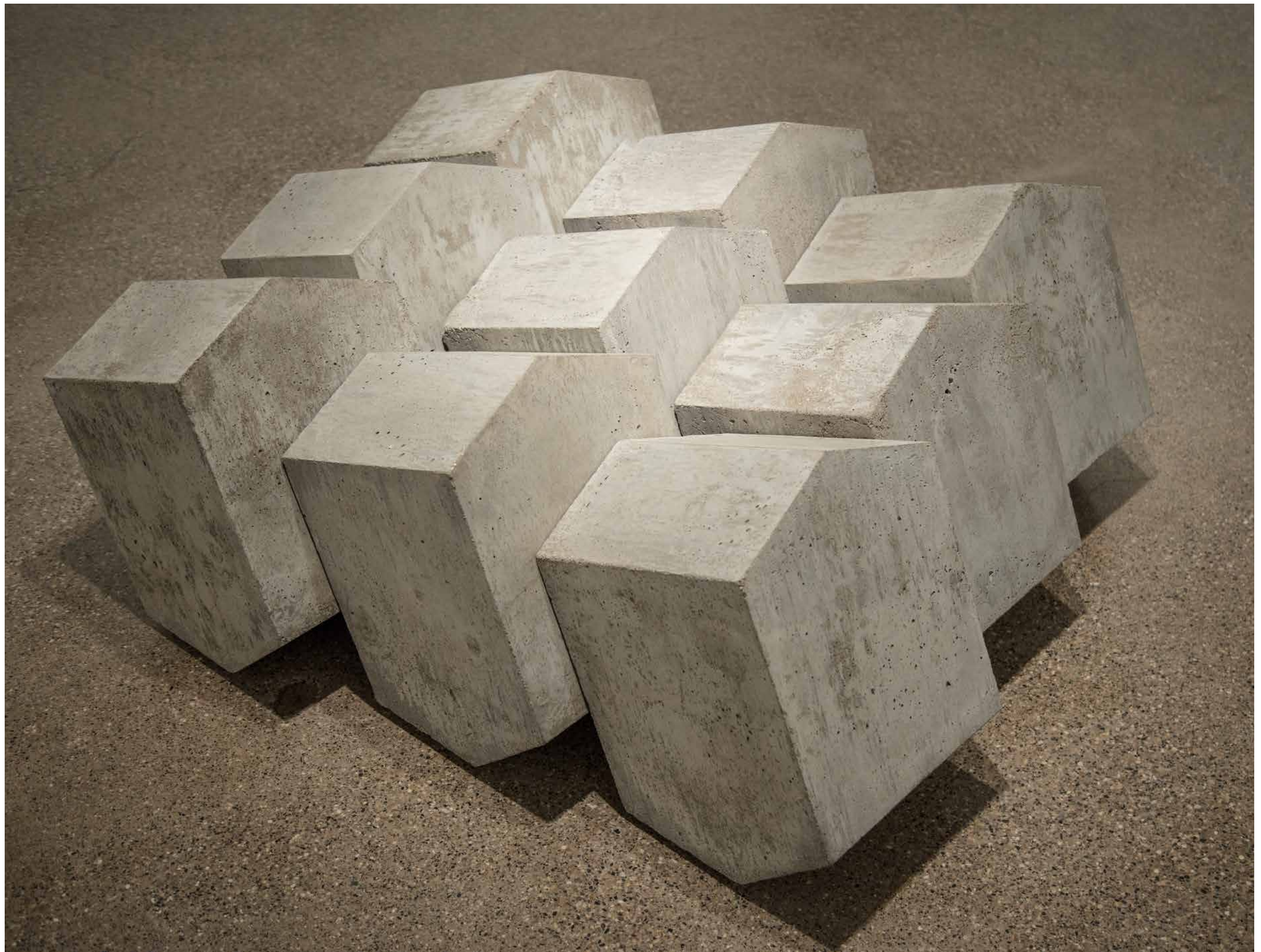
Hand-cut faux bois shelf paper on rag stock
18 collages; 15 x 22 in. each

freestanding

Six views, 2017

Cast concrete
9 elements; 17 x 12 x 12 in. each







Six views, 2017



front wall
Transposed Houses, 2016

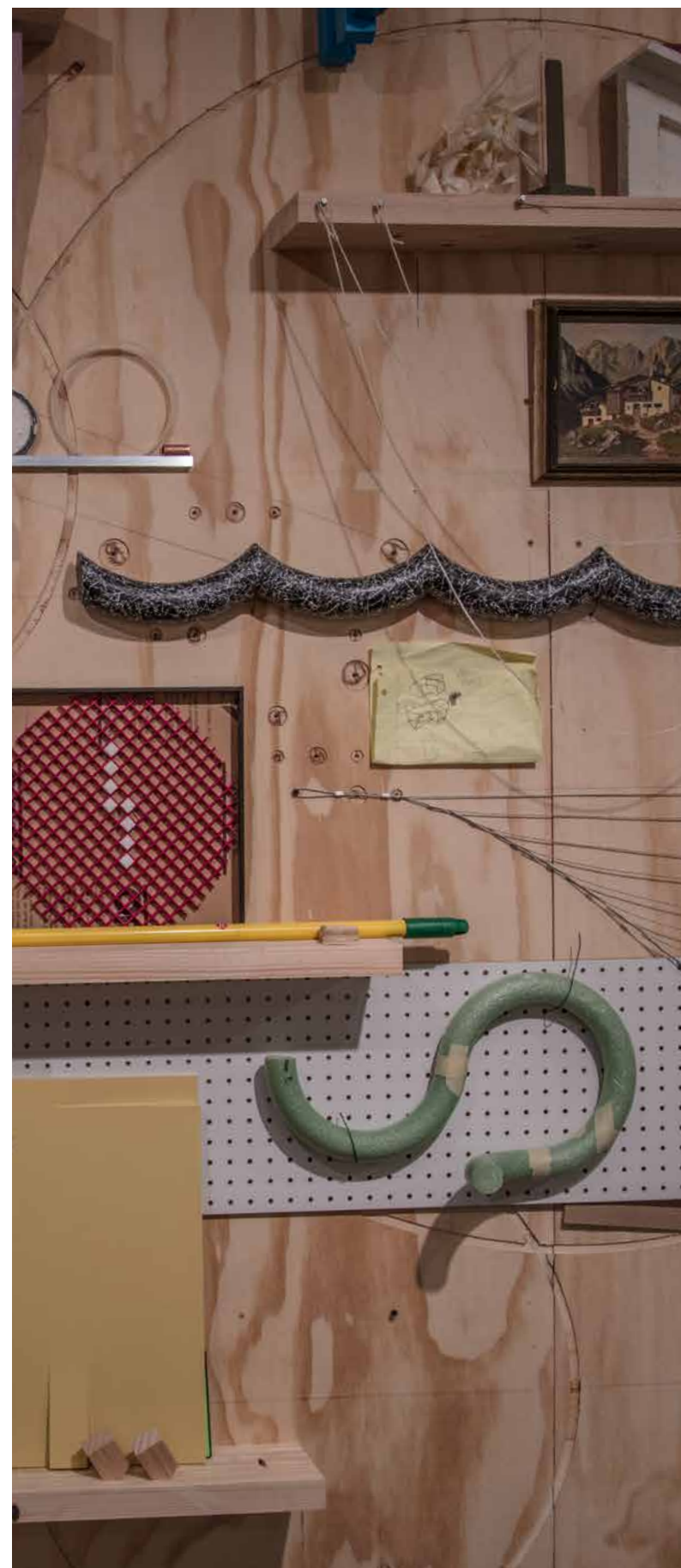
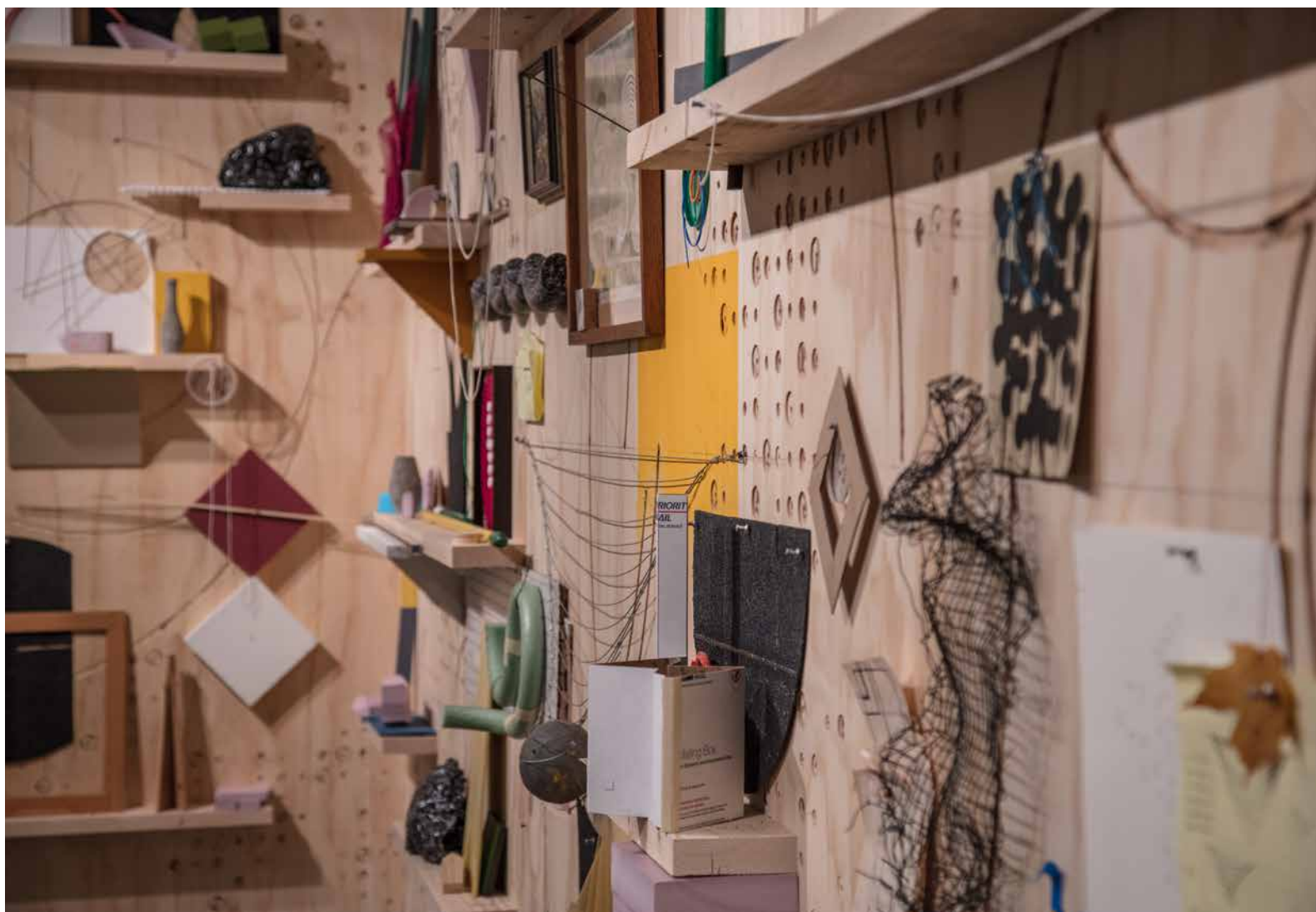
freestanding
Six views, 2017

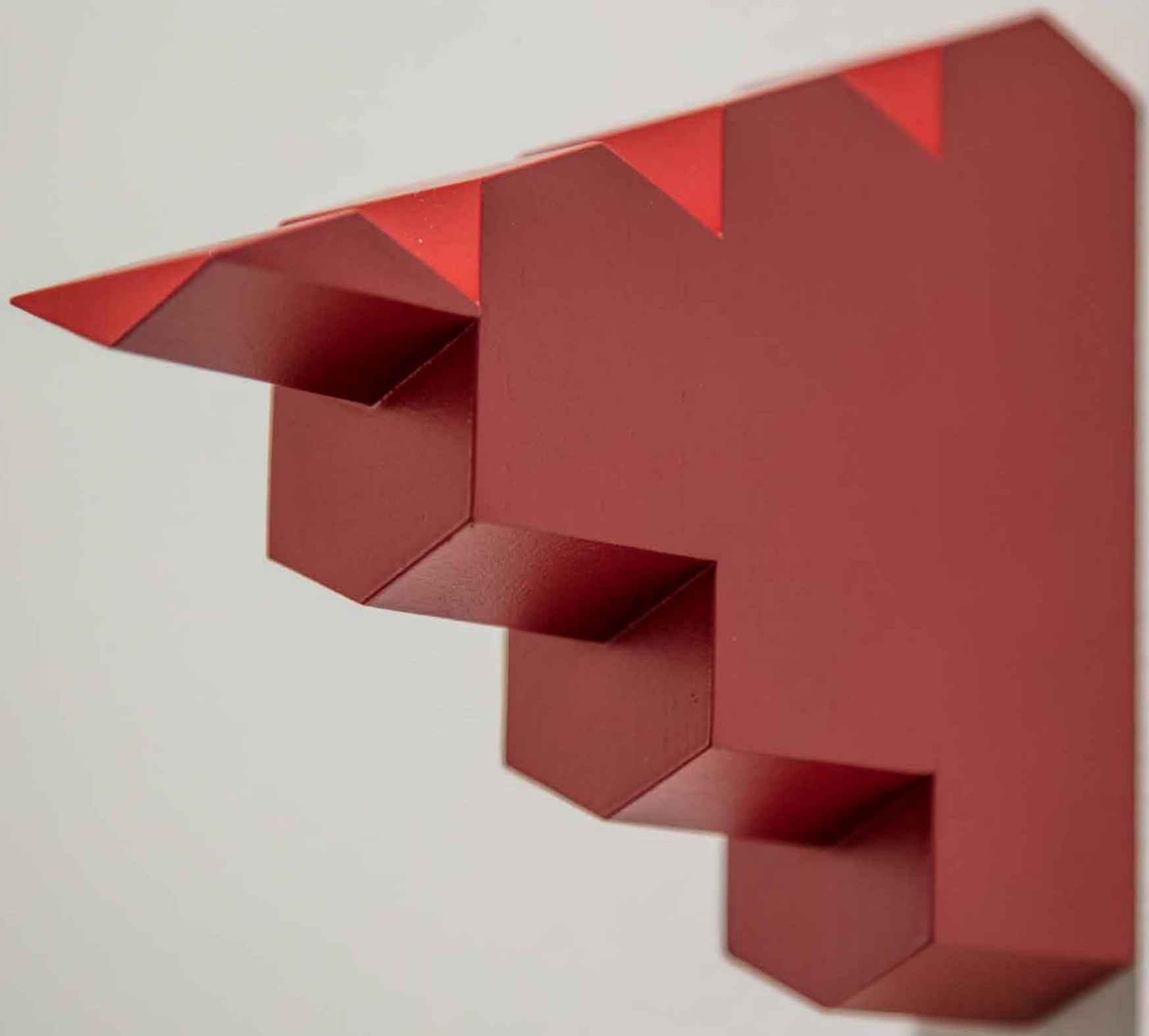
background
Ball Drop, 2017





▼
Ball Drop, 2017

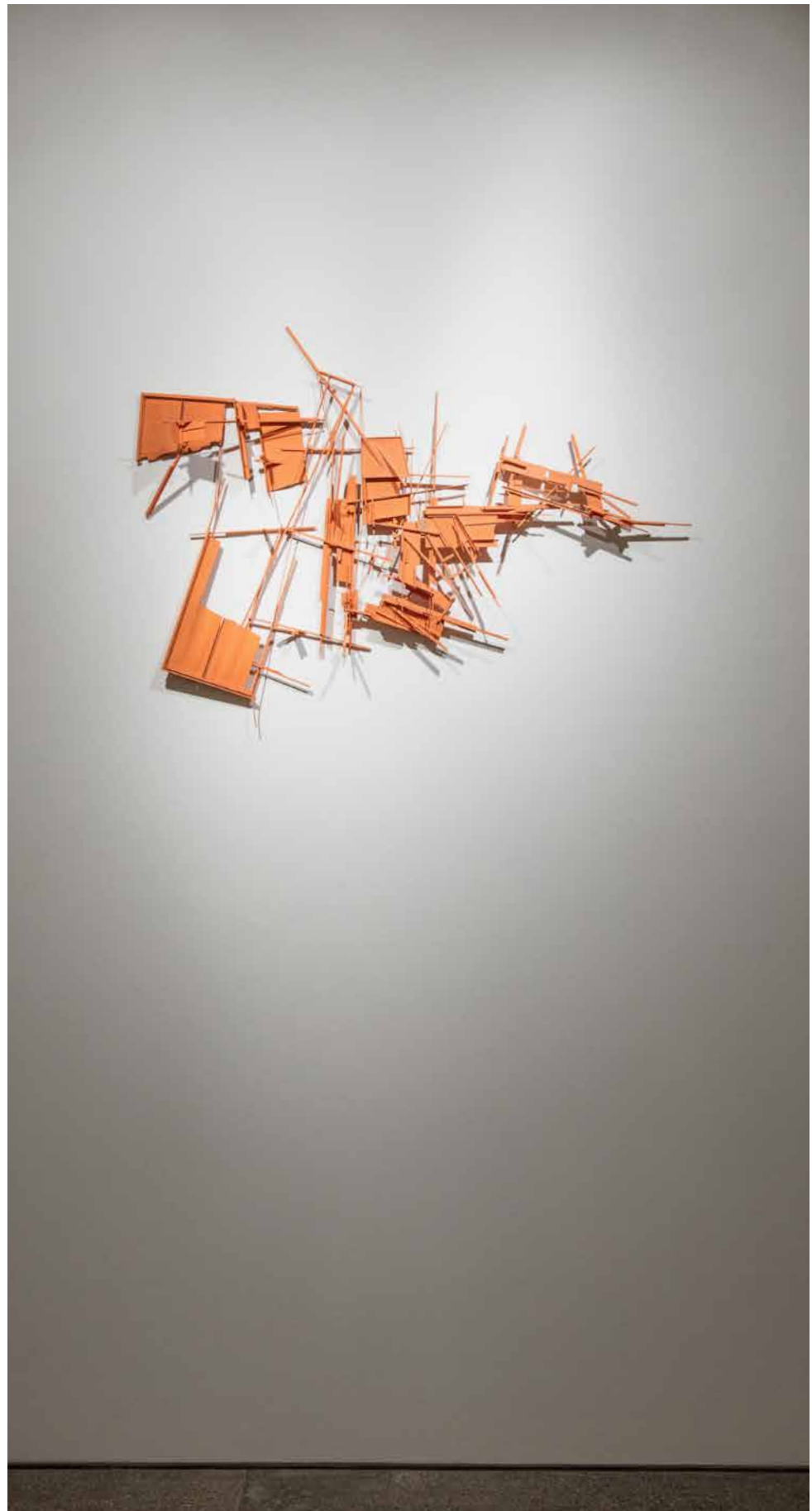
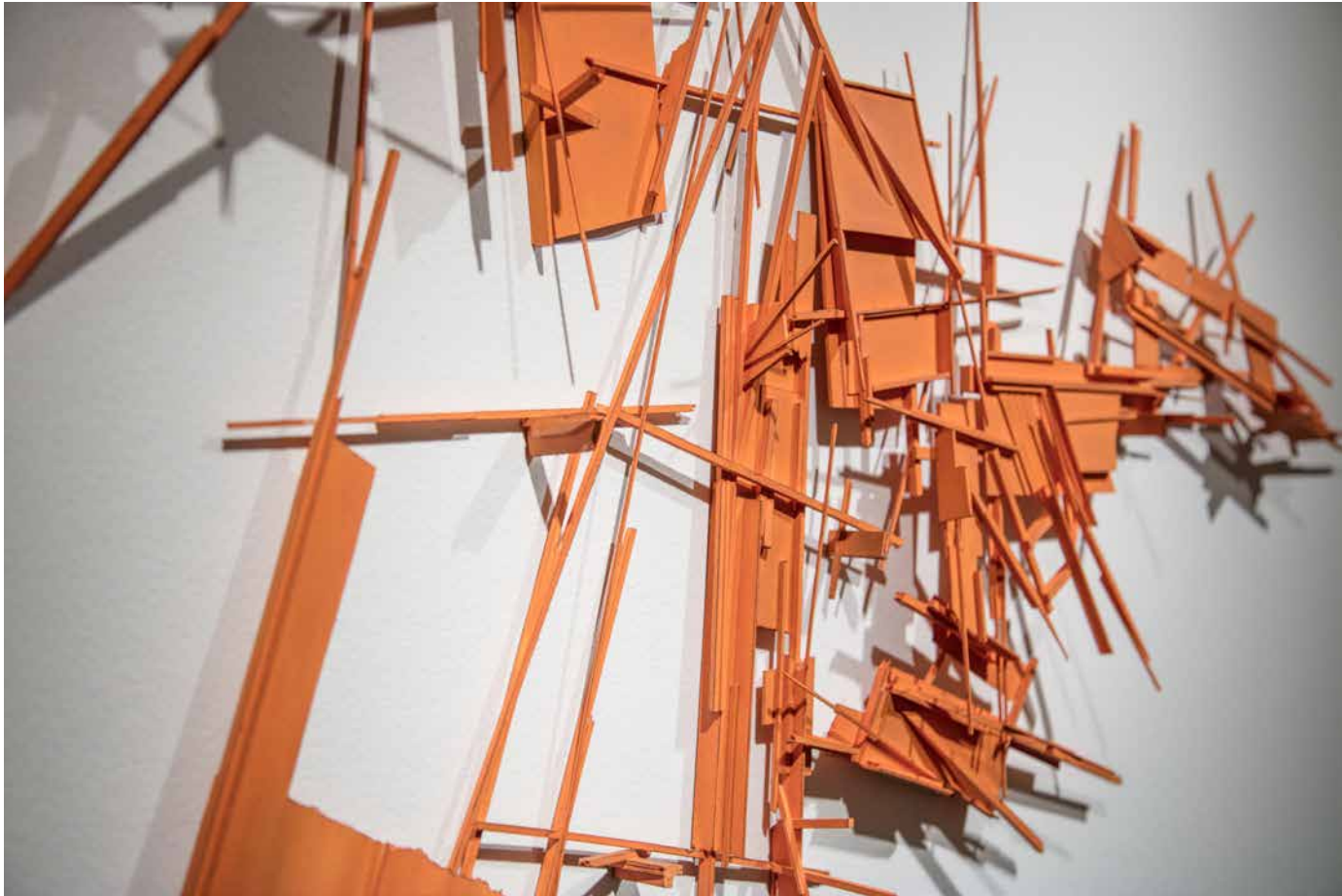






▲
Orange Shed, 2016
 Latex on Basswood
 29 x 40 x 4 in.
detail lower left
 ▼

▲ ▲
Western Ziggurats, 2016
 Enamel on Pinewood
 6 elements; 6 x 1.5 x 6 in. each.





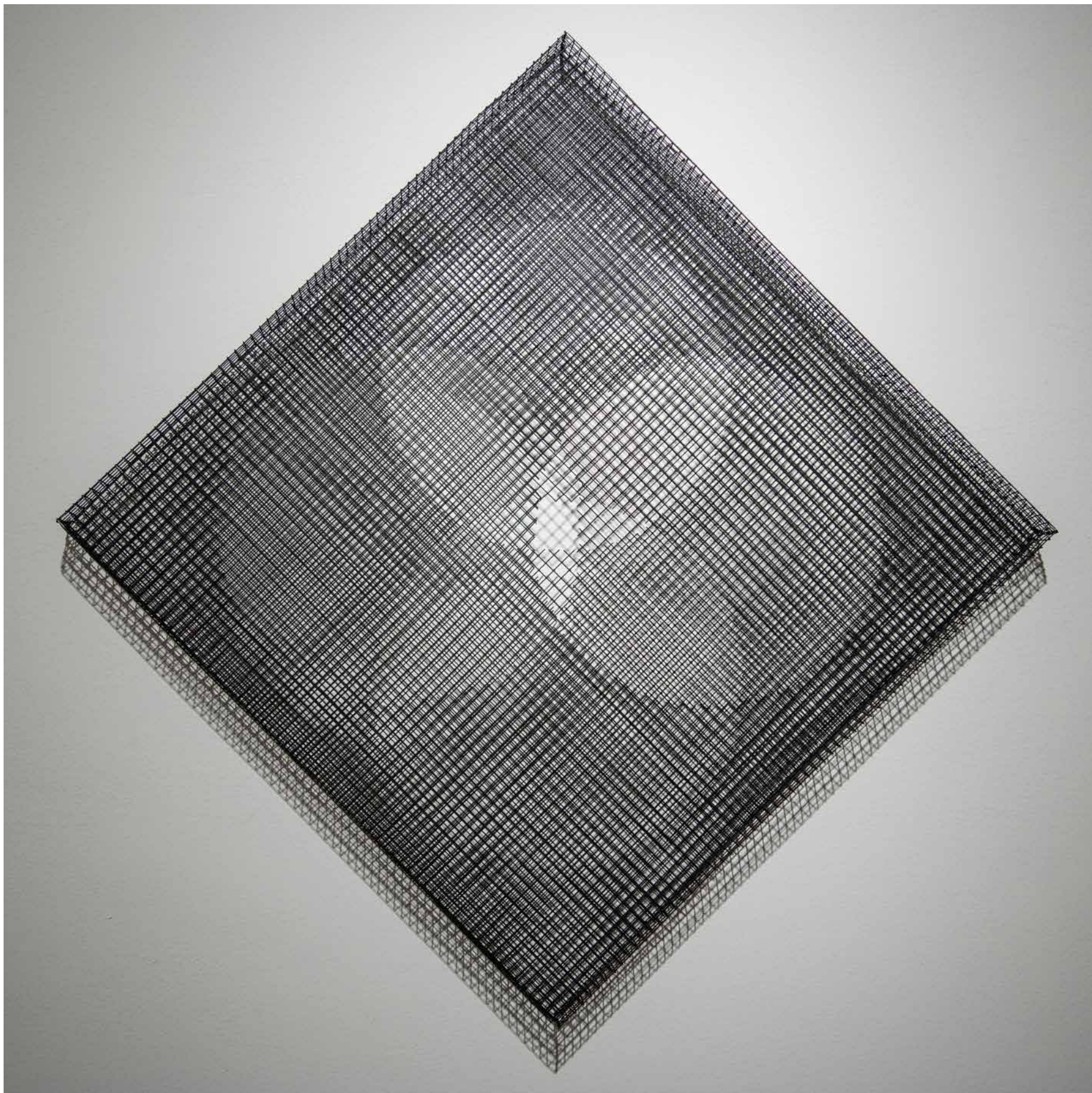


Yellow Cabin, 2015
Latex on Basswood
15 x 17 x 8 in.



Gray Relief, 2017
Primed Basswood
21 x 22 x 1.5 in.

detail right



 **All Ways**, 2016
Hardware cloth,
spray paint
21 x 21 x 2 in.



Vier Verblikken

(detail), 2017

Copper and paint cans
4 elements, 8 x 7 in. each



objects left to right

Some Time, 2016
Hardware cloth,
spray paint
28.5 x 28.5 x 1.5 in.

Lodestone, 2017

Yellow Cabin, 2015

Puigmal, 2016
Cast concrete
17 x 22 x 20 in.

Arcalod, 2016
Cast concrete
14 x 15 x 16 in.

Gray Relief, 2017

Chamechaude, 2016
Cast concrete
15 x 14 x 15 in.

Vignemale, 2016
Cast concrete
18 x 27 x 15 in.



TOP LEFT
objects left to right

Chamechaude, 2016

Puigmal, 2016

After Morandi, 2017

Vignemale, 2016

TOP RIGHT
foreground

left: **Vignemale**, 2016

right: **Arcalod**, 2016

Cast concrete

14 x 15 x 16 in.

background: **Bündner Schist**, 2017

Crepe tape on wall

70 x 153 in.



After Morandi, 2017

Mixed media

17 elements; variable dimensions





 Puigmal (detail), 2016




 clockwise

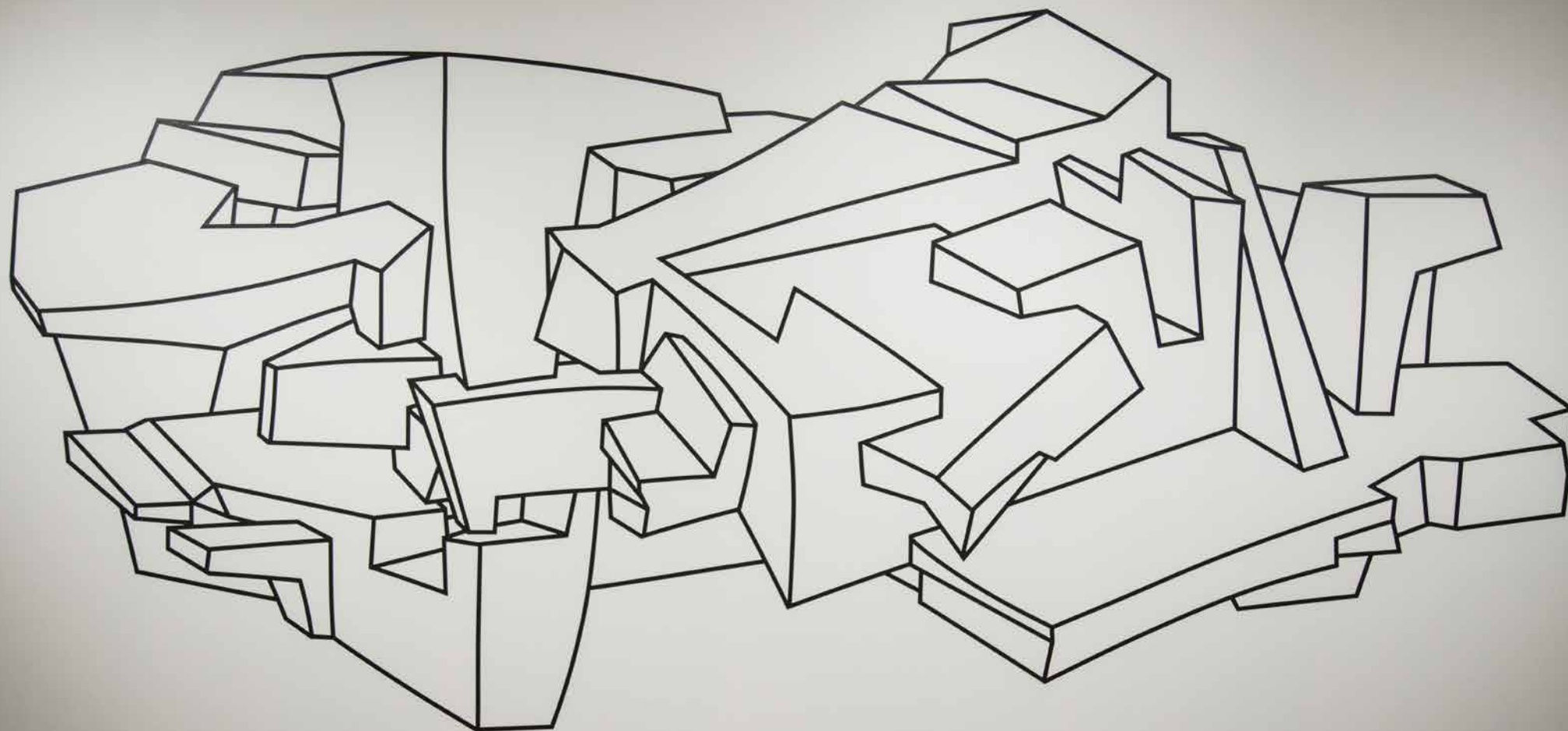
Puigmal (detail), 2016

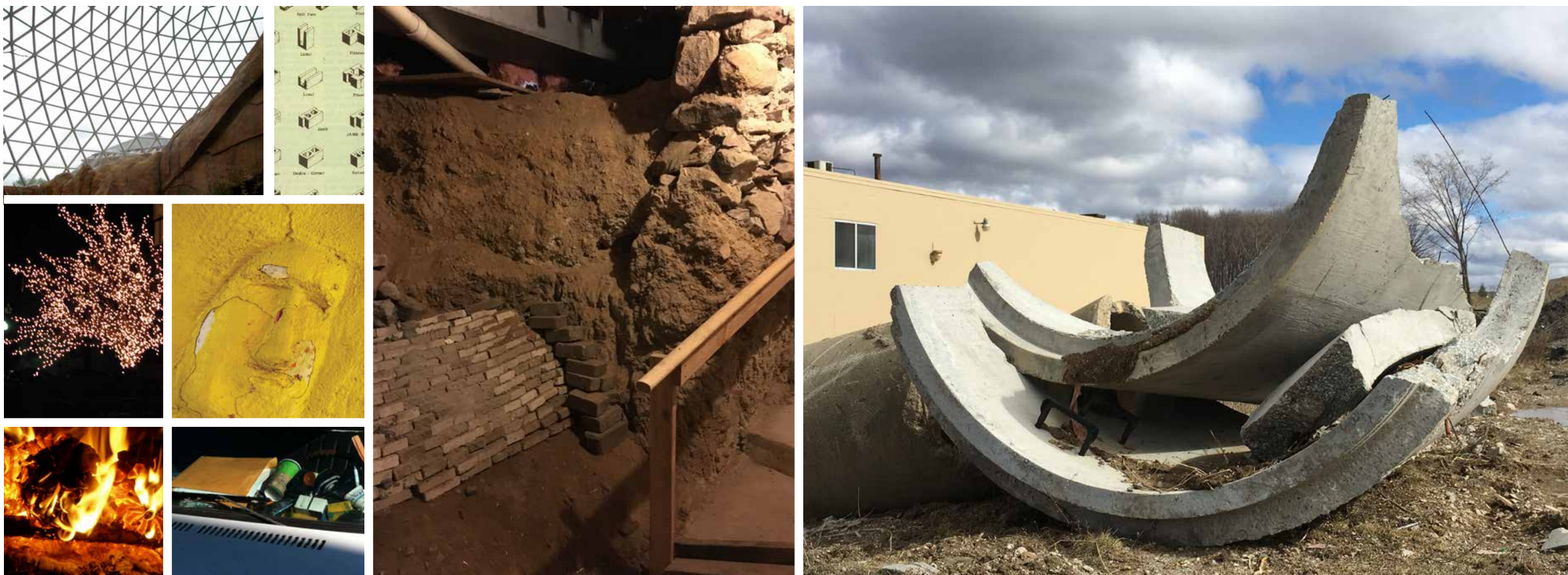
Arcalod (detail), 2016

Chamechaude (detail), 2016

Vignemale (detail), 2016







CODY VANDERKAAY

TERRESTRIAL CELESTIAL

OAKLAND UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY



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