

ALYSON SHOTZ





Intricate Metamorphosis (#1-5) 2020
Plated carbon steel
Dimensions variable
As pictured: 156 × 20 × 13 in / 396.2 × 50.8 × 33 cm each approx



From left:

Double Moon 2020

Recycled rubber bicycle inner tubes, copper nails, copper washers, wood
48 × 33 × 2 in / 121.9 × 83.8 × 5 cm

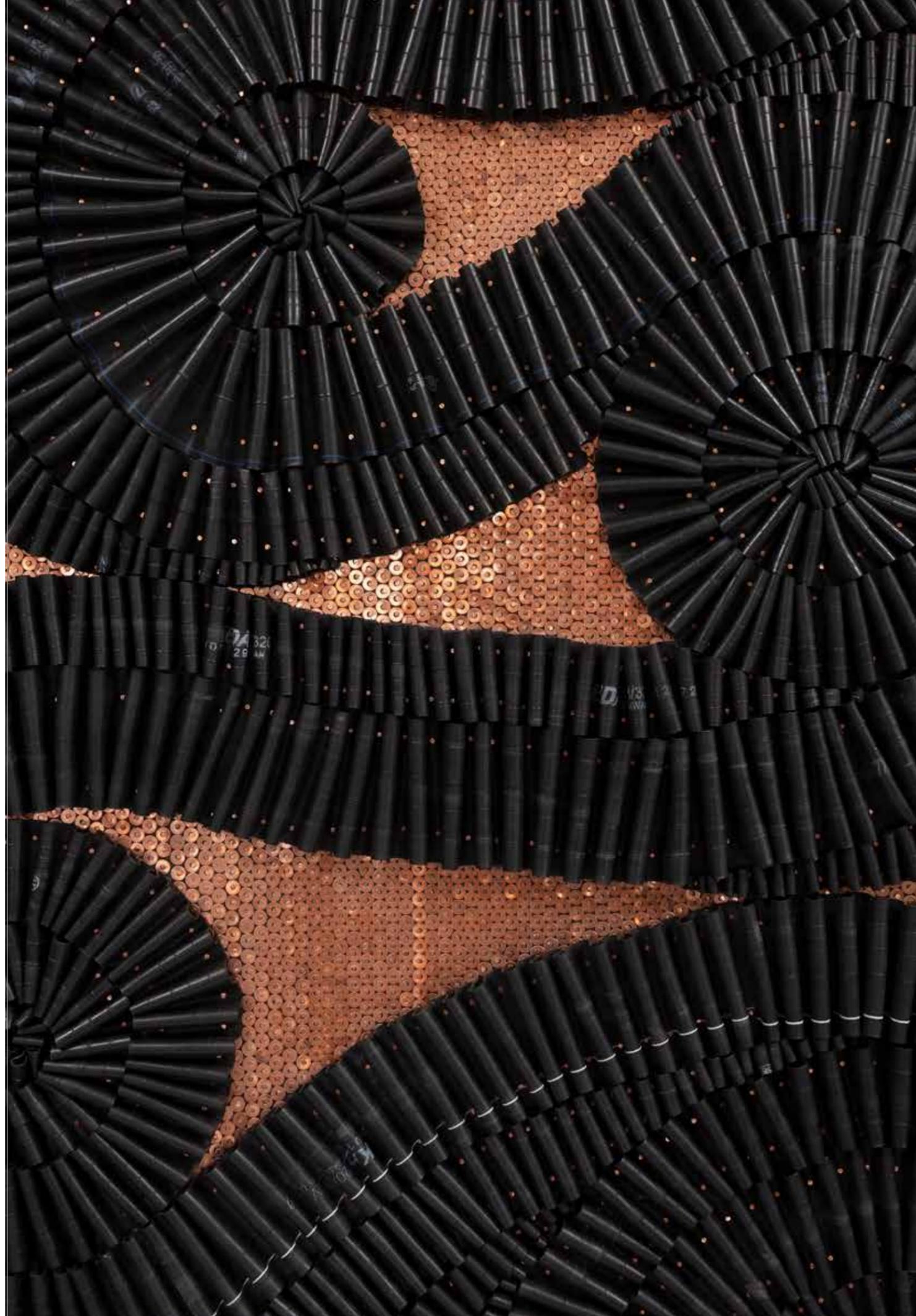
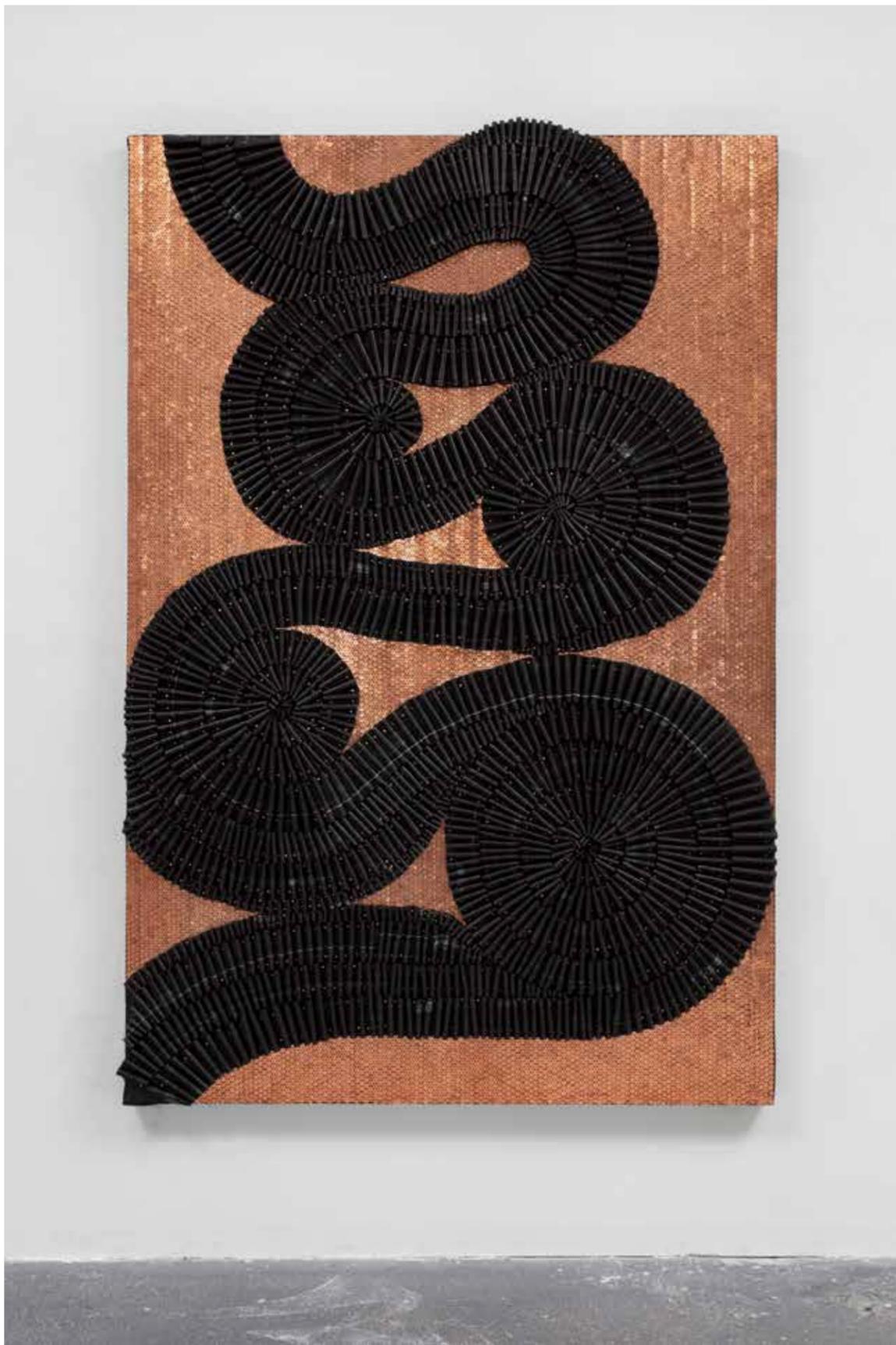
Penumbra 2020

Recycled rubber bicycle inner tubes, copper nails, copper washers, wood
48 × 33 × 2 in / 121.9 × 83.8 × 5 cm

Through 2020

Recycled rubber bicycle inner tubes, copper nails, punched copper, wood
72 × 48 × 2 in / 182.8 × 121.9 × 5 cm





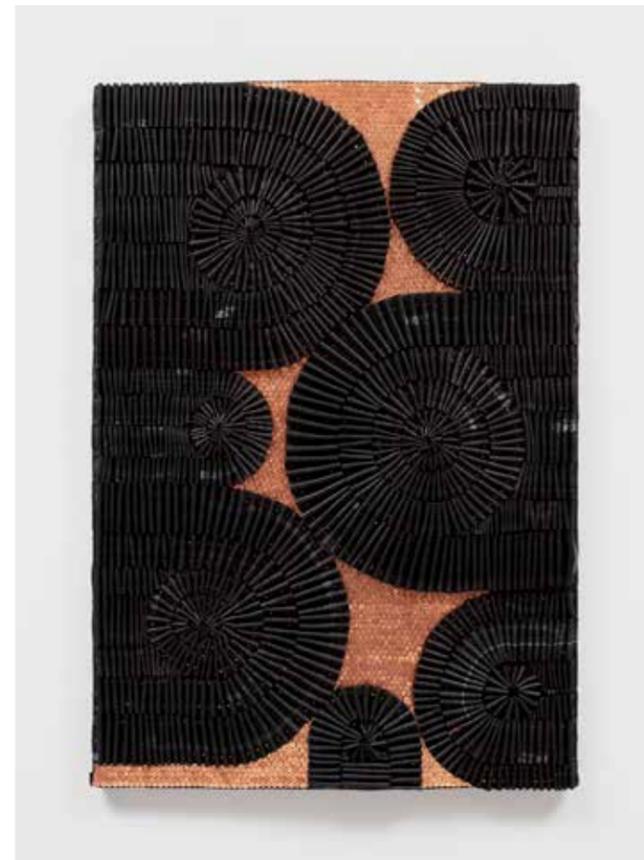
This page and opposite: *Chronometer* 2020
Recycled rubber bicycle inner tubes, copper nails, copper washers, wood
72 × 48 × 2 in / 182.8 × 121.9 × 5 cm



From left:
Soft Black 2019
Recycled rubber bicycle inner tubes, copper nails, wood
72 × 48 × 2 in / 182.8 × 121.9 × 5 cm

Small Chronometer 2019
Recycled rubber bicycle inner tubes, copper nails, copper washers, wood
48 × 33 × 2 in / 121.9 × 83.8 × 5 cm

Untitled 2019
Recycled rubber bicycle inner tubes, copper nails, wood
48 × 33 × 2 in / 121.9 × 83.8 × 5 cm



The Planar Deployments of an Empirical Explorer:

Alyson Shotz's Handmade Knowledge of the World

Jennifer R. Gross

The work is preternatural. Even as the filigree of suspended elements that comprise Alyson Shotz's *The Shape of Space* and *Scattering Screen* overwhelm the viewer with their intricacy, one is struck by the realization that these sculptures are an accumulation of simple planes shaped by gravity. Beguiling in their delivery of light and optical sensation, the works' phenomenological wizardry has been constructed by hand. Closer inspection reveals confections of cut plastic lenses and mirrored steel disks assembled into reflective fields through the countless repetition of monotonous, precise gestures. Sustained engagement with these objects renders them more enigmatic, not less. Creating immersive atmospheres of visual wonder, these works play light in time, merging pixelated components and the articulation of space between them into unified forms. Particulate blankets, equal parts matter and air, the seen and the reflection of things seen, these

sheets form aggregate volumes without accruing into mass.

Shotz has been interested in the confluence of things in the world for a long time. Having studied geology as an undergraduate student, she said on becoming an artist, "I was intent on expressing the perceptual sensation that I had, that there was a kind of psychic as well as physical seepage of the body into the landscape and landscape into the body. I hoped to create and be inside an optical continuum that would relate back to the physical continuum I experienced."¹ Through art, she has been able to question the solidity of "things" in the world and engage the spectrum of density that making art has revealed to her. She strives to see things herself, "to get a glimpse of some reality that is beyond our grasp."²

The reach of her inquiry is ambitious in scale on both macro- and microscopic levels. Beyond mere aesthetic and philosophical considerations, her regular studio discoveries have included sculptures

1: NAT TROTMAN, "LIGHT AND SPACE: A CONVERSATION WITH ALYSON SHOTZ AND NAT TROTMAN," UNPUBLISHED INTERVIEW, DECEMBER 2011.
2: IBID.
3: SHOTZ IN CONVERSATION WITH THE AUTHOR IN HER STUDIO, FEBRUARY 12, 2020.
4: TROTMAN, "LIGHT AND SPACE."
5: ALYSON SHOTZ, "THE SHAPE OF SPACE," LECTURE, WHITNEY HUMANITIES CENTER, YALE UNIVERSITY, OCTOBER 11, 2017.



From left:
The Shape of Space 2004
Cut plastic Fresnel, lens sheets, and staples
175 × 456 × 96 in / 444.5 × 1158.2 × 243.8 cm
Collection of The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum
Reflective Mimicry 1996
C-Print
36 × 24 in / 91.4 × 60.9 cm

that function as models of molecular constructions—as fine as subatomic particles and folded proteins—as well as clocks that enabled her to visualize the procession of the earth around the sun. She creates three-dimensional armatures for what are essentially optical questions about the life of matter.³ The work is not representational, as she does not know what will be revealed by exploring how she sees. She is discovering the foundations of matter one sculptural experiment at a time. If you ask Shotz why she is a sculptor, her answer confirms her faith in haptic knowledge: "I believe very strongly in the idea that materials have something to tell us about the world."⁴ Time and again, scientific research has confirmed her hunches about the world based on her studio experiences. Whether it is the shape

of a gravitational wave, or that proteins are inactive until they are folded, or that optical caustics is the natural way that dimensions connect through light, she finds that science has names or the things she builds.

Shotz comes to an understanding of phenomena, in a sense, from behind or before visualization. She attempts to construct, on human scale, real phenomena in time—that which she/we would otherwise be incapable of experiencing or comprehending. The work is the thing she has created *and* the thing itself that is with us and beyond us moving through time, transcending the singular moment of human encounter. Shotz's work thus challenges Immanuel Kant's theory of transcendental idealism, refuting our apprehension of the appearance of things by articulating

their inherent form, by creating the thing in itself. For the viewer to join her in her discoveries, the experience of the work must entail more than mere observation. Instead, Shotz's sculptures invite immersion in the slipstream of matter in time, a sensation that engages more than the eye. She has described her work as yielding "an atmosphere, a visual nugget of weather."⁵ As the primacy of virtual realities encroaches ever more on—and limits—our experiences of the world, Shotz's work offers a radically embracing alternative to the viewer's exiled senses.

As three-dimensional forms, Shotz's creations might be classified as sculpture, but they do not fit the conception of sculpture as obdurate object. Her structures are flexible, responsive, and frequently translucent. In this, her work is groundbreaking in the history of sculpture, the result of a maker enabled by the material and technological possibilities of the twenty-first century. In this,



Shotz follows in the lineage of great twentieth-century sculptors such as Auguste Rodin, David Smith, and Eva Hesse, whose large-scale works were defined by the limits of their chosen materials within their respective industrial ages: cast bronze, welded steel, molded fiberglass. Advanced polymers, tensile steel wire, 3-D laser cutters, computer modeling, and electroplated steel make it possible for Shotz to achieve large volumes without creating mass. Unlike process artists working in the late twentieth century, who followed material to discover form, Shotz sources materials that have the potential to perform the shapes she imagines. She then figures out a system of assembly that responds to the material's capacities and lets it define its own shape with the help of gravity and light.

Although trained as a painter, Shotz says she does not like to draw. Perhaps this is in part due to the fact that such a gated, flat, and time-restricted response to the world could not hold her

attention. Instead, she shifted her focus to the dimensional (third and beyond), the organic change in twentieth-century art making Donald Judd called out in his landmark essay "Specific Objects" in 1965. That is, that an artist could use any material in three dimensions of real space to get rid of the real limits of painting, since "actual space is intrinsically more powerful and specific than paint on a flat surface."⁶ Through experience, Shotz understood that her relationship to the world, an embodied perception informed by her hands working in concert with her eyes, was inherently more complex than what she could capture in two-dimensional media. She recognized her potential to render something more interesting and accurate about the world through sculpture. If she could capture the interface of eye and hand in space and time, rather than on a plane, she could potentially make objects that extended into space rather than disrupted it.

6: DONALD JUDD, "SPECIFIC OBJECTS," ARTS YEARBOOK 8 (1965).
7: TROTMAN, "LIGHT AND SPACE."



From left:
Mirror Fence 2003–14
Starphire mirror and aluminum
36 × 1656 × 4 in / 91.4 × 4206.2 × 10.1 cm
Collection of Storm King Art Center
Equilibrium 2009
Stainless steel wire, silvered glass beads, aluminum
120 × 108 × 144 in / 304.8 × 274.3 × 356.7 cm
Black Fold #1, 3 and 5
Hand folded and painted aluminum
23 × 26 × 21 in / 60.3 × 66 × 55.2cm each approx

While her methodology is empirical, her methods are intuitive. She likes to follow a hunch and then subsequently explore any avenues of inquiry discovered through the process it generates. To begin a work, Shotz might envision a line that she wants to see in three dimensions. She then compounds the line in her computer into a three-dimensional model. This becomes a building block for a sculpture she will make once she identifies the best materials for its realization at human scale in layers of space defined by lines that can be walked through. Repetition of line or form by hand is fundamental to the building of her sculptures. Performing her work into being this way takes her body on the journey her mind is constantly traveling. Whether throwing

porcelain, bending and nailing rubber, threading beads on wire, the durational practice of construction roots Shotz in her observations. The resulting work is thus an echo of the human form in time.

She has recently begun to fold rubber—specifically used rubber bicycle innertubes that have travelled many miles—to create wall reliefs. From a distance, the resulting reliefs suggest the writhing movement of microbes in a petri dish. Shotz was drawn to this material through her experience of the optical behavior of her *Black Folds* (1–9), 2014, painted-aluminum sculptures that do not represent space but perform it. Their blackness optically sucks up the space they occupy, actualizing what the artist describes as "a very physical illusion."⁷

Shotz takes pleasure in riding a bicycle to her studio every day, and she has confessed her choice of material this time is a bit nostalgic. The innertubes most likely will not be available for long, as tires being manufactured today do without them. Her choice also speaks to the diminished human presence and real engagement in the physical world, as more time is spent riding stationary bicycles in gyms while looking at videos of a virtual landscape than in a world replete with authentic sights and smells. Will Shotz's process become irrelevant to the human condition or more essential as the friction of being embodied human matter in time, subject to gravity, potentially dissipates in a world predicated on virtual experience and knowledge? This is yet to be determined. In the meantime, Alyson Shotz invites us to join her on her expeditions into real experience. If we are not too distracted, self-absorbed, or busy, we may just learn a thing or two about the world and the power of our own perceptions.

This page and next: *Scattering Screen* 2016
Punched polished stainless steel and stainless steel wire
108 x 216 x 24 in / 274.3 x 548.6 x 61 cm
Collection of Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, AK







Eccentric Orbit
Hand bent and welded bronze
46 × 32 × 32 in / 116.8 × 81.3 × 81.3 cm
#1 from an edition of unique variants

Lexicon (detail) 2019
Glazed ceramic (stoneware)
85 × 55 × 10 in / 215.9 × 139.7 × 25.4 cm





Installation view of *Alyson Shotz: Un/Folding*, at the Weatherspoon Art Museum, Greensboro, NC, 2019

Laws of Motion #10 2015
Cast and polished bronze
13 x 15.75 x 18 in / 33 x 38.7 x 45.7 cm



Crushed Can 2019
Carved and polished aluminum
36 × 23.5 × 2 in / 91.5 × 60 × 5 cm
AP, Ed.3





This page and next: *Object for Reflection* 2016
Punched aluminum and stainless steel rings
122.5 × 145 × 57 in / 311.2 × 368.3 × 144.8 cm
Collection of Guggenheim Bilbao

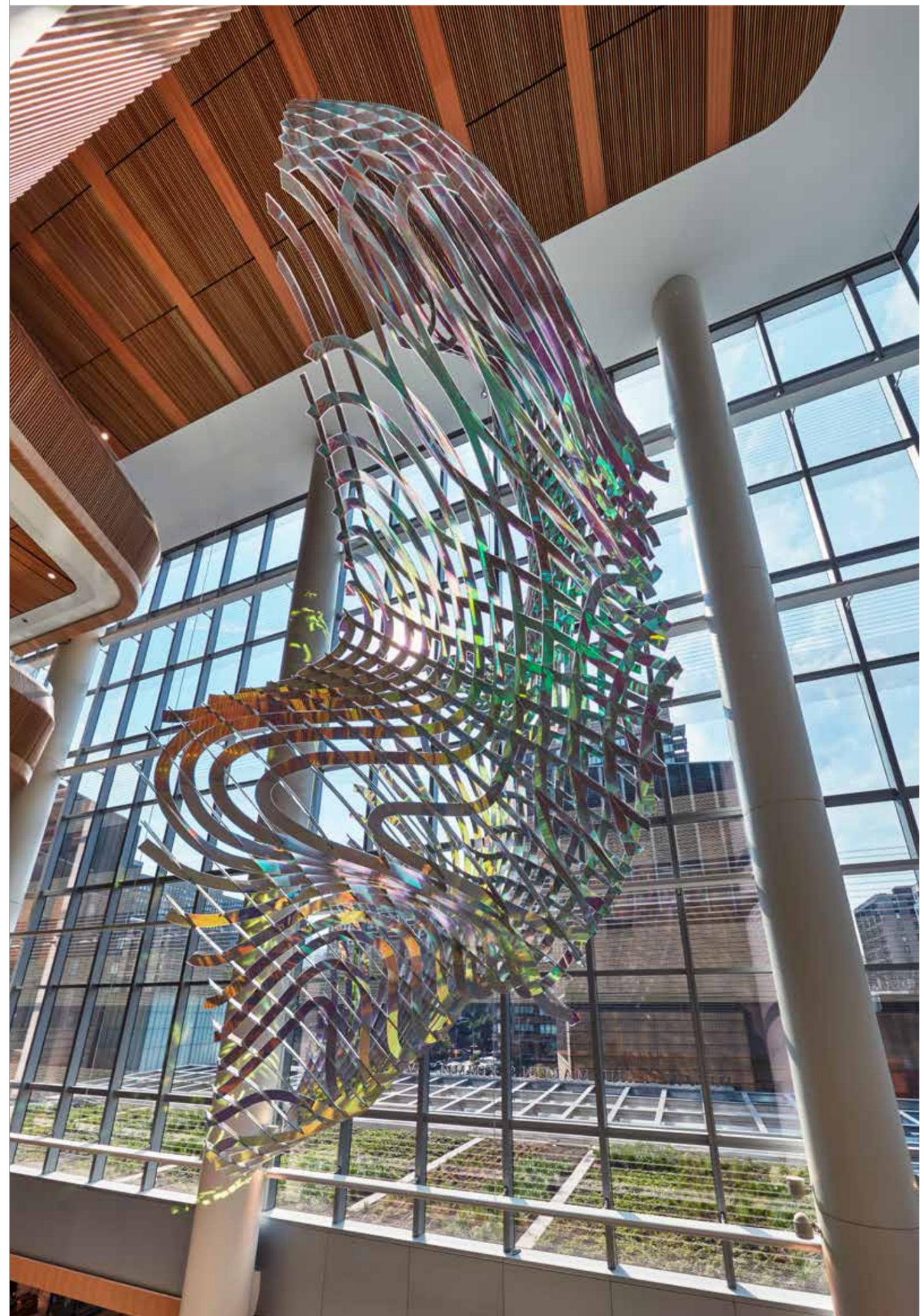
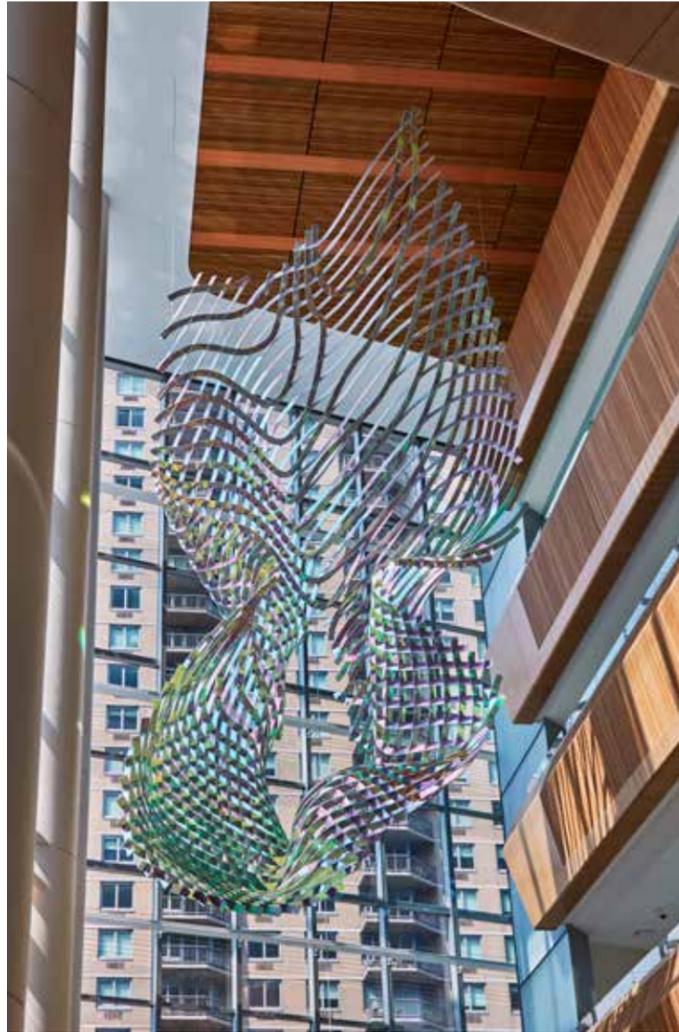






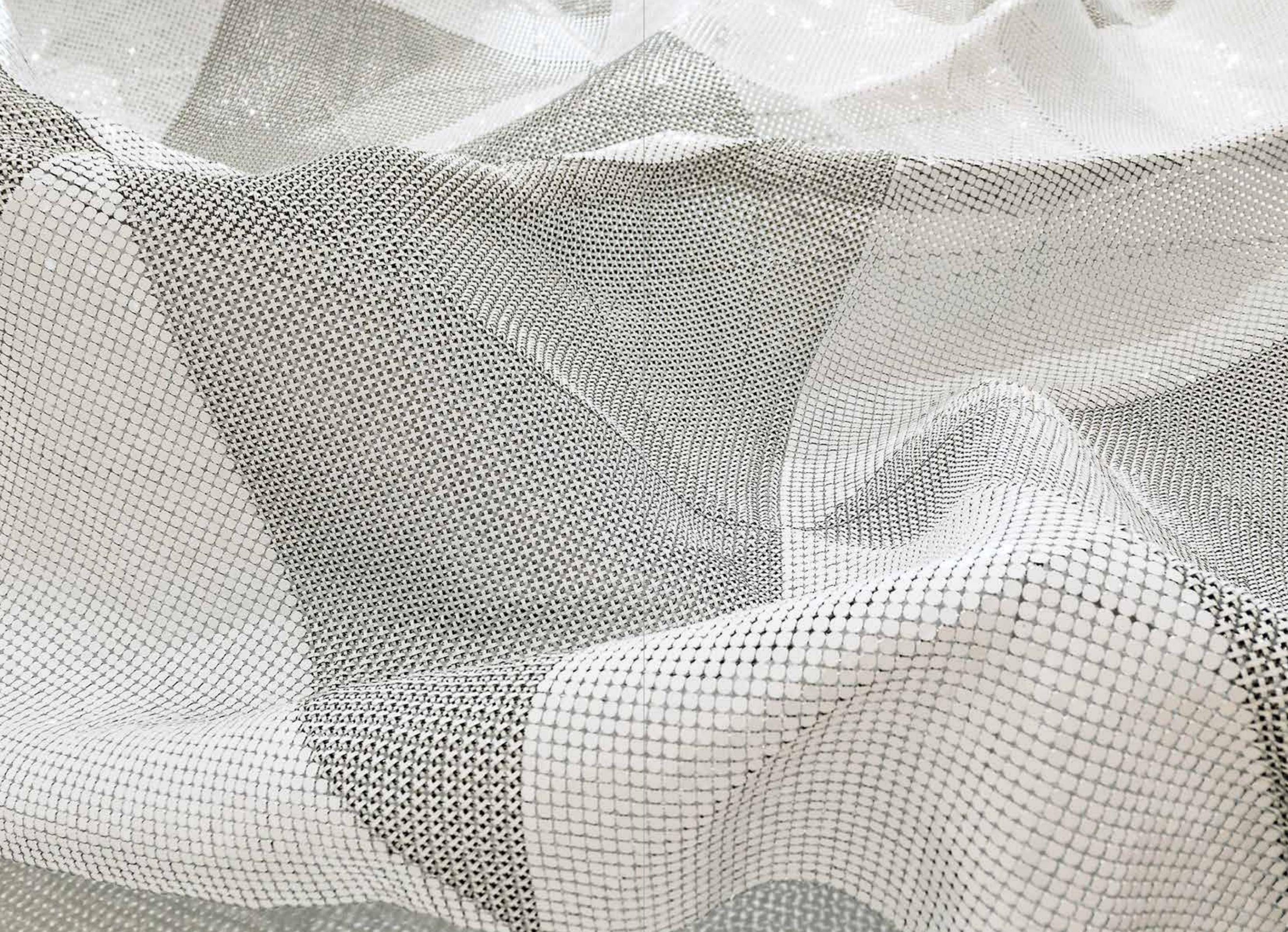
Legend's Line 2019
Polished stainless steel and stainless steel cable
46 x 2808 x 216 in / 116.8 x 7132.3 x 548.6 cm
Private Virginia Collection

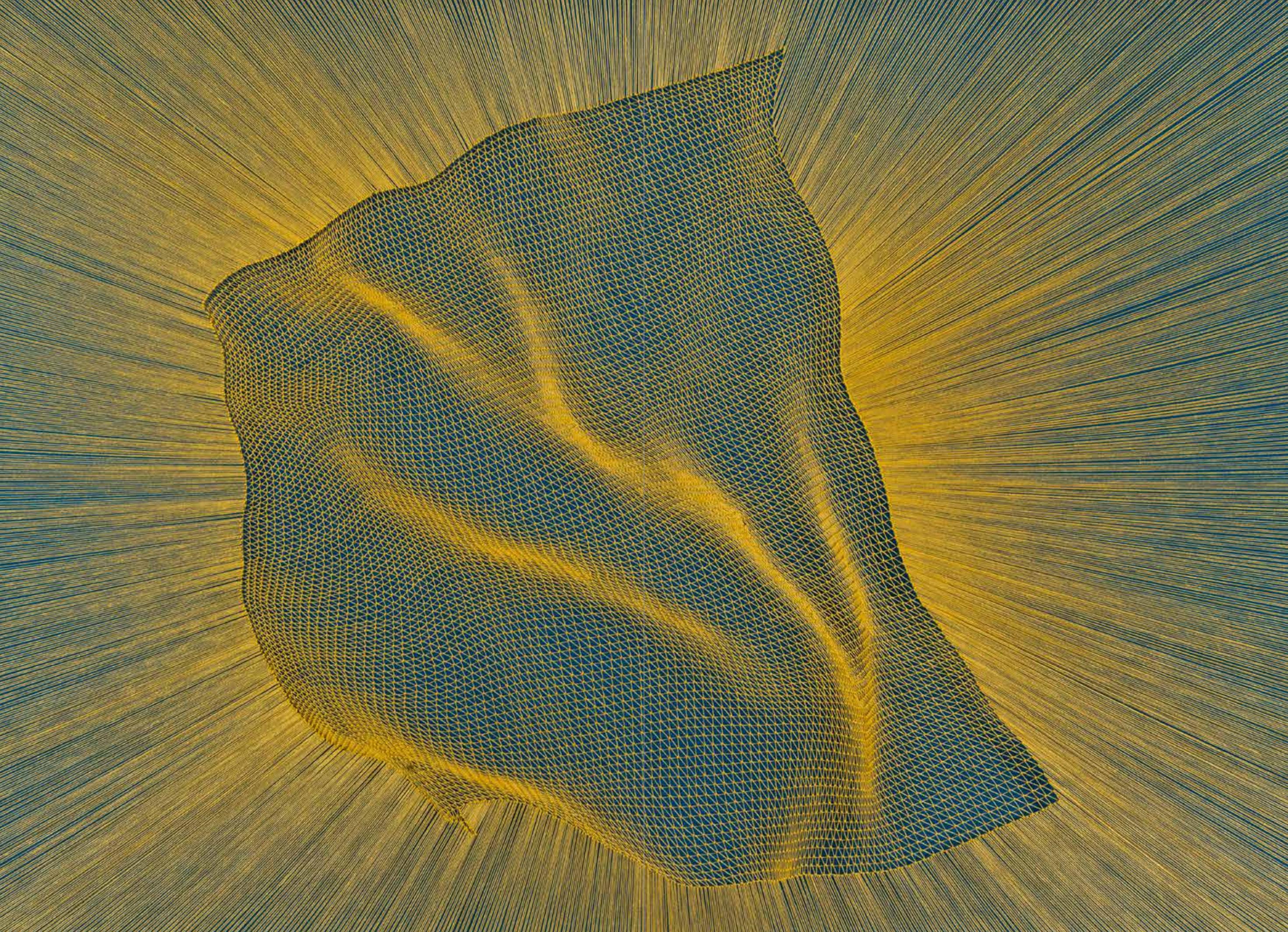
The Moon's Eyelid 2018
Welded aluminum with acrylic, dichroic film, stainless steel hardware
542.5 × 267.25 × 219.25 in / 1377.95 × 678.82 × 556.9 cm
Permanent installation at the Helen L. and Martin S. Kimmel Pavilion, NYU Langone Art Program and Collection, New York, NY





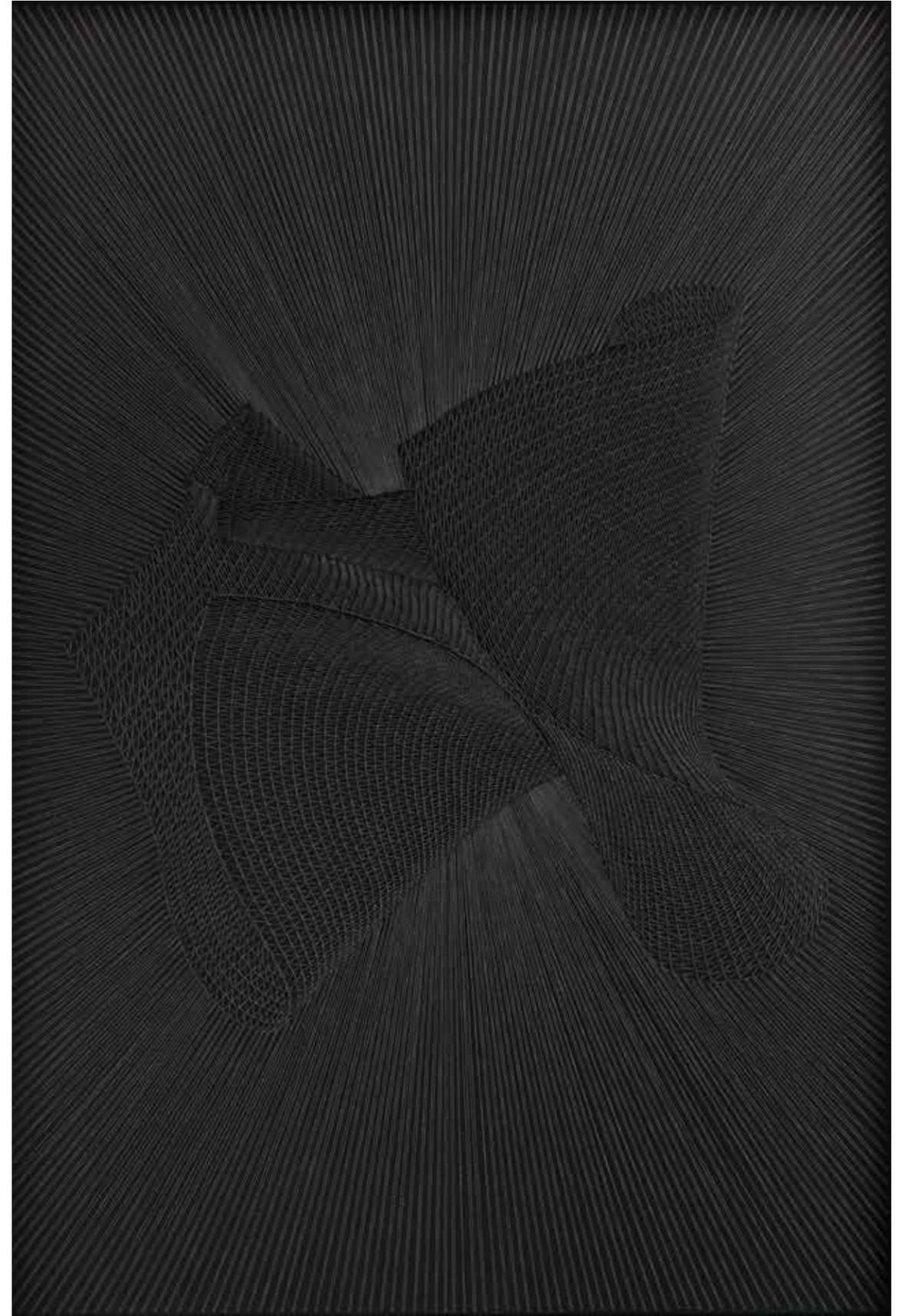
This page and next: *Experiment in Gravity* 2019
Punched and painted aluminum trailer truck skin, stainless steel rings, painted steel bases
54 × 145 × 130 in / 137.2 × 368.3 × 330.2 cm
Installation view of *Alyson Shotz: Un/Folding*, at the Weatherspoon Art Museum, Greensboro, NC, 2019





Previous: *Falling Fold (Yellow #3)* 2019
Wet spun yellow linen thread and pins on panel
48 × 72 in / 121.9 × 182.8 cm

Below: *Gravity Fold* 2019
Wet spun black linen thread and pins on panel
72 × 48 in / 182.8 × 121.9 cm
Collection of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York



Falling Folds 2019
Etched low iron glass
336 x 504 in / 853.4 x 1280.1cm
Permanent Installation at Norra Kvarngardet, Uppsala, Sweden

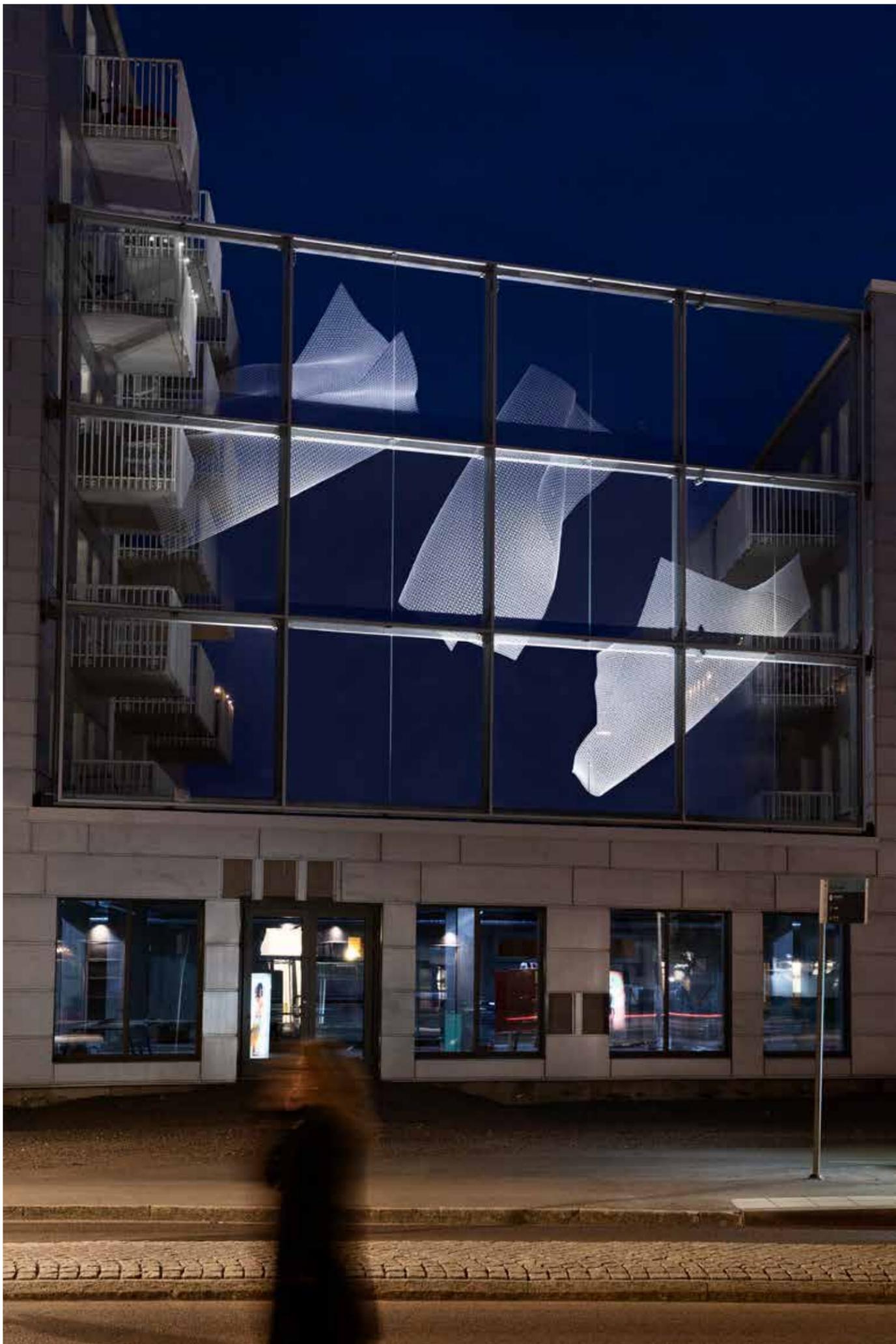


IMAGE CREDITS

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Legend's Line

AVA HASSENGER

Black Fold #1, 3 and 5

STEPHEN IRONSDIE

Scattering Screen

SANNA LINDBERG

Falling Folds

JOERG LOHSE

Octopus Dreaming

Double Moon

Penumbra

Through

Chronometer

Soft Black

Small Chronometer

Untitled

Eccentric Orbit

Recumbent Cube #2, 6, 4

JACQUELINE MCGILVRAY

Scattering Screen (detail)

ADAM REICH

Lexicon (detail)

Crushed Can

Object for Reflection

Falling Fold (Yellow #3)

Gravity Fold

TOM POWEL IMAGING

The Moon's Eyelid

JERRY L. THOMPSON

Mirror Fence

WEATHERSPOON ART MUSEUM, UNC GREENSBORO

Installation view of Alyson Shatz: Un/Folding

Experiment in Gravity

MARK WOODS

Equilibrium

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