



**Diane Landry**

22 September – 30 October 2005

## Diane Landry

Flying School (*École d'aviation*) and Mandala Naya

The Cod (*La Morue*)

**Rice Gallery**  
HOUSTON, TEXAS

## Foreword

On August 29, 2005, halfway through the worst Atlantic hurricane season on record, Hurricane Katrina breached New Orleans' levees and flooded the city. Throughout September heart-breaking stories emerged in the wake of the destruction of New Orleans and the dispersion of her residents. Less than a month later while we were still shocked and grappling with the effects of Katrina, Hurricane Rita formed off the Texas Gulf Coast.

While listening to Rita reports, Diane Landry assembled her installations, *Flying School* and *Mandala Naya*, at Rice Gallery. Diane had never experienced a hurricane before, but instead of being unnerved she was curious about the new experience that awaited her, and was determined to finish her installation. She chose not to leave Houston to escape the storm and steadily continued her work, calmly observing the unfolding drama swirling around her. Sewall Hall, which houses the gallery, is considered one of the sturdiest buildings on campus, so despite the tension of the looming unknown we felt secure taking shelter there.

By opening night, Thursday, September 22, Houston seemed deserted. Businesses were boarded up, store shelves were cleared of water and other staples, the streets were empty. Despite a certain lack of guests, we decided that it would be a shame for Diane not to get her party, so we had her opening anyway. The ten attendees included the president of Rice, David Leebron, who, demonstrating an extraordinary grace under pressure, took a break from the university hurricane emergency preparations to join our celebration. He and his wife, Ping Sun, spent a full thirty minutes with Diane, making her feel like a guest of honor should.



Friday, September 23, Diane, the Rice Gallery staff, and a few stray friends, spent the night in the gallery sleeping on pallets made of acoustical foam left over from an installation the previous year. Our ten beds encircled *Flying School*, twenty-four umbrellas standing resolutely in the center of the gallery. As we drifted to sleep, they stood guard and suffused us with a feeling of calm and comfort.

In the end, the storm turned east so that Houston was not seriously affected. What we remember most now is how magical it was to sleep in such intimate quarters with *Flying School*. Before she left for home, Diane told us, "I'll never forget the night I spent with my umbrellas." Neither will we.

Kimberly Davenport  
Director

## On Diane Landry



*Lighthouse (Le Phare)*, 1996  
Photo by Daniel Le Névé

Diane Landry is one of Canada's foremost performance and installation artists. In both genres, she uses everyday objects and a subtle combination of sound, delicate movement, soft light, and moving shadow to captivate viewers causing them to stop, linger, and experience. In a sense she suspends time. Although her work can invoke the wonder of childhood play and fantasy, its cyclical nature alludes to life and death.

After graduation from Laval University in Québec in 1987, Landry worked as a sculptor and performance artist. Over time, light and shadow became two of the central elements in her performances, most notably in *Patin sur place (Skate to Stay)*, 1993, a dynamic work that portrayed the span of a human life. During the performance, Landry wore a pair of ice skates mounted on joined wooden rockers. Strapped to her back was an odd contraption of curved Plexiglas and an electric lamp that cast her shadow, a human form with luminescent wings, onto the wall in front of her. At first, Landry rocked unsteadily like a child taking her first steps; then she spread her arms wide exuding the confidence of an adult before she drooped into old age by curling into a fetal position and becoming still before the light went out.

In the late 1980s, Landry traveled throughout Canada and Germany collecting commonplace objects that she used in her sculptures. Gradually Landry realized that like her performance pieces, she wanted to include the elements of time and movement in her sculpture. She tried many ways of incorporating these elements into her sculptural works, but she was hindered by a lack of technical knowledge. In 1996, collaborating with members of *Obscure*, an interdisciplinary collective of Québécois artists, Landry learned about the controllers, sequencing, and other mechanical functions necessary to create *Le Phare (Lighthouse)*, her first automated installation. In *Le Phare*, Landry mounted objects, including a teapot, colander, toothbrush, and an ice skate, on turntables standing on tall, spindly legs. As the turntables rotated, the tower-like structures swayed, and the objects' enormous shadows projected onto the wall, like characters in a kinetic drama.



*Skate to Stay (Patin sur place)*, 1993 – 1995  
Photo by Jocelyn Robert

With this installation, Landry achieved what she wanted to do: to recreate in her installations the element of time that was such a vital aspect of her performances. She even coined the term, *oeuvre nouvelle (movel work)*, to describe a work whose full effect is dependent on the passage of time. She explains, “Just as a work of music requires listening from start to finish, a *movel work* must be watched for some time before its full meaning can be grasped.”

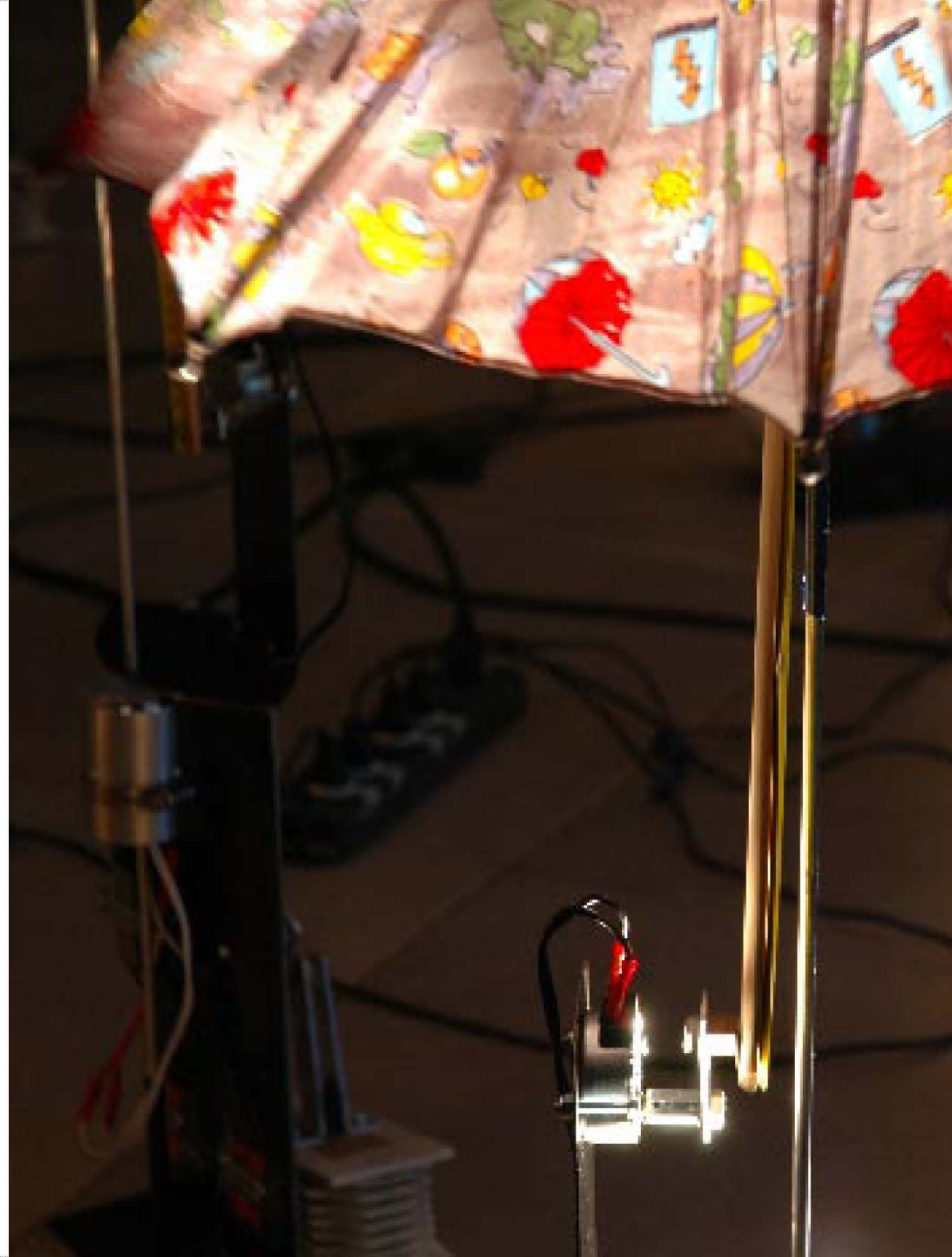
Both installations at Rice Gallery, *Flying School* and *Mandala Naya*, were *oeuvres nouvelles*. *Flying School* illustrated a cycle of life, as ordinary umbrellas opened like living, breathing entities, only to close and die a few minutes later. As they expanded and contracted, the umbrellas squeezed handmade bellows at their bases, moving at the cadence of human breath and producing tones that mingled to form a delicate symphony. “I tried to find a motor speed that was close to human breathing. To amplify the idea of breathing, I made a little accordion for each umbrella because the sound of breath when you inhale is different from when you exhale,” Landry notes. A small light at the base of each umbrella provided the only illumination in the gallery. As the umbrellas opened, the lights turned on, casting a kaleidoscope of flowery shadows onto the ceiling. As the umbrellas closed, their inner lights faded and their life cycles ended. According to Landry, *Flying School*, “touches on the double meaning of the French word *temps*. There is *temps* in the sense of ‘time’ — past, present, and future — but there is also *temps* in the sense of ‘weather,’ with its remarkable unpredictability. *Flying School* recounts a vision of *le temps qu’il fait* (the weather), as well as a reminder of the ingenious efforts we expend on finding ways to forget *le temps qui passe* (time passing).”

Deriving from the Sanskrit word for “circle,” a mandala is an artistic representation of the cosmos, and is used in Eastern religious traditions as a focus for meditation. Using the now-ubiquitous plastic water bottle, Landry's mandalas conjure shadow versions of this

spiritual symbol. Each of Landry's mandalas is created from only one kind of bottle, and bears the name of the brand of water it once held, i.e., *Mandala Evian*. In *Mandala Naya*, a laundry basket ringed with water bottles was attached to the wall. A tripod, supporting a light attached to a mechanized arm, stood in front of the basket. As the arm moved forward, the light shone through the holes of the basket and through the water bottles, creating a startlingly beautiful shadow that stretched across the wall. That was the reward for watching *Mandala Naya* for its entire one-minute cycle; just as with traditional mandalas, the time required to experience the work makes it an object of contemplation. About the construction of *Mandala Naya*, Landry notes, "I wanted to make a beautiful object. I can take a bottle and make it look bad, but I wanted to make you look at that object as if it is beautiful, because what is in the bottle is so beautiful, so wonderful; it is life."

Since performance is an integral part of Diane Landry's work, on Friday, 28 October 2005, she returned to Houston to perform a 30-minute performance piece, *The Cod (La Morue)*, at the Rice Media Center. In the darkened theater space, facing a screen with her back to the audience, Landry stood like a DJ over a pair of turntables. Within arm's reach was a repertoire of household objects and toys, including an iron, a colander, a bouquet of plastic flowers and a yellow rubber duck. Landry deftly placed, removed, and juxtaposed these "characters" on the rotating turntables while two small halogen lights pointing at the turntables projected the objects' shadows onto the screen at fantastical proportions. The only sound of the performance was the rumble and scrape of the turntables revolving, amplified through the house speakers by a single, raw wire lightly touching the surface of each. The weight of the objects on the turntables slowed them at varying rates, changing the pitch and rhythm of the sound. Similar to *Flying School*, the sounds of *The Cod* were inextricably linked with objects and their shadows. In this performance, Diane Landry continued her exploration of life's cyclical nature. In the wildly careening shadows of ordinary objects, the artist conjured a narrative of daily routine unsettled, as well as the relentless passing of time.

In all Landry's *oeuvres nouvelles* and performances, the methods she uses to create the captivating effects are clearly visible, as are the origins of the objects she uses. *Mandala Naya's* elements of construction were left exposed so that it was immediately apparent to the viewer how the shadows were created. Likewise, the umbrellas of *Flying School* stood amidst the tangle of cords and cables that powered them, and the mechanisms that animated the umbrellas and squeezed the bellows were clearly visible. Landry wants to emphasize the simplicity of her work. "It's magic," she says, "but you can see it."





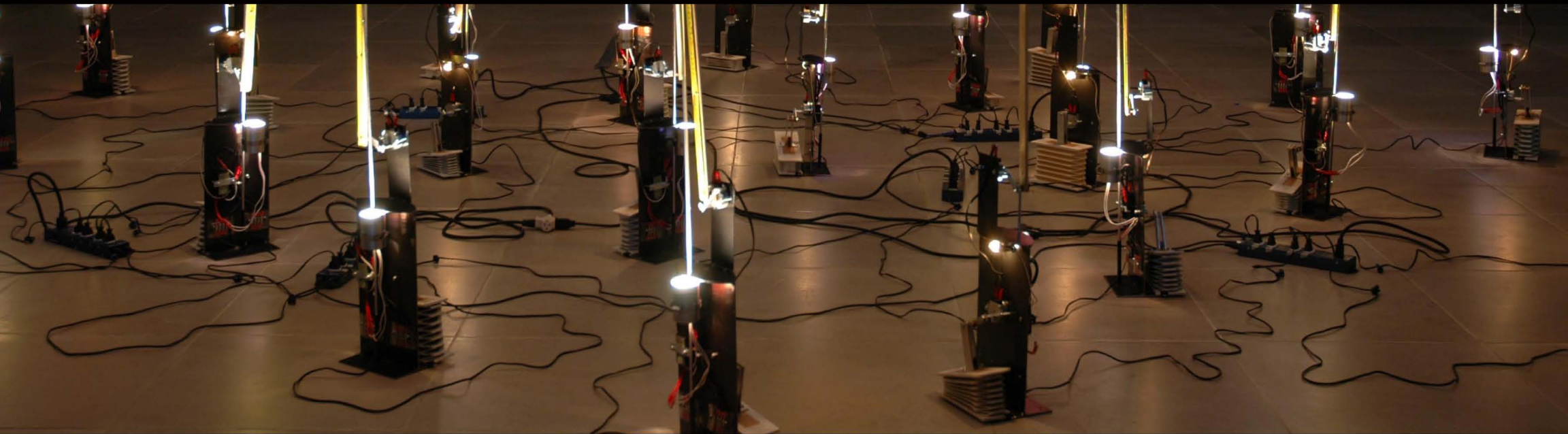
Flying School (*École d'aviation*)









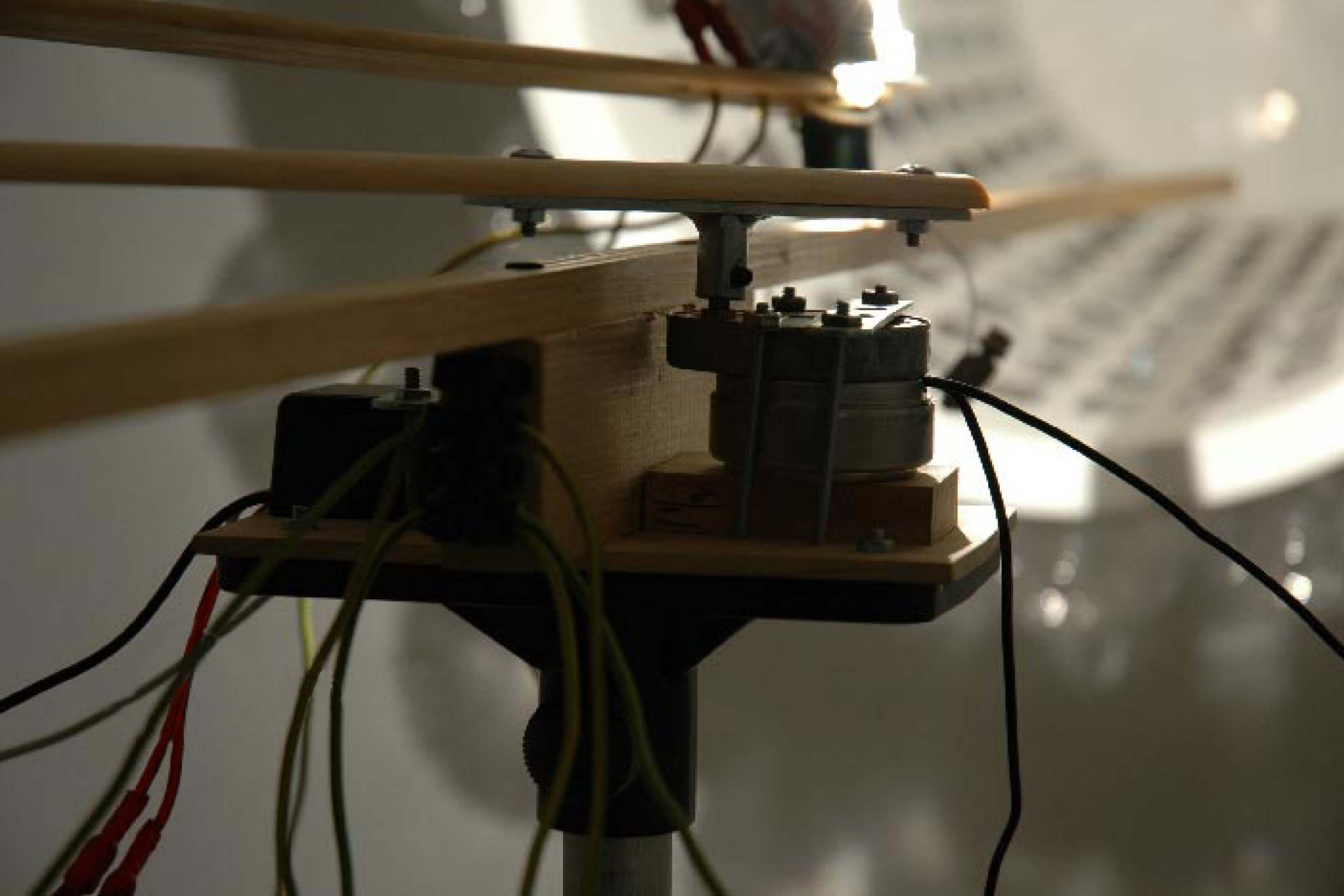




Mandala Naya







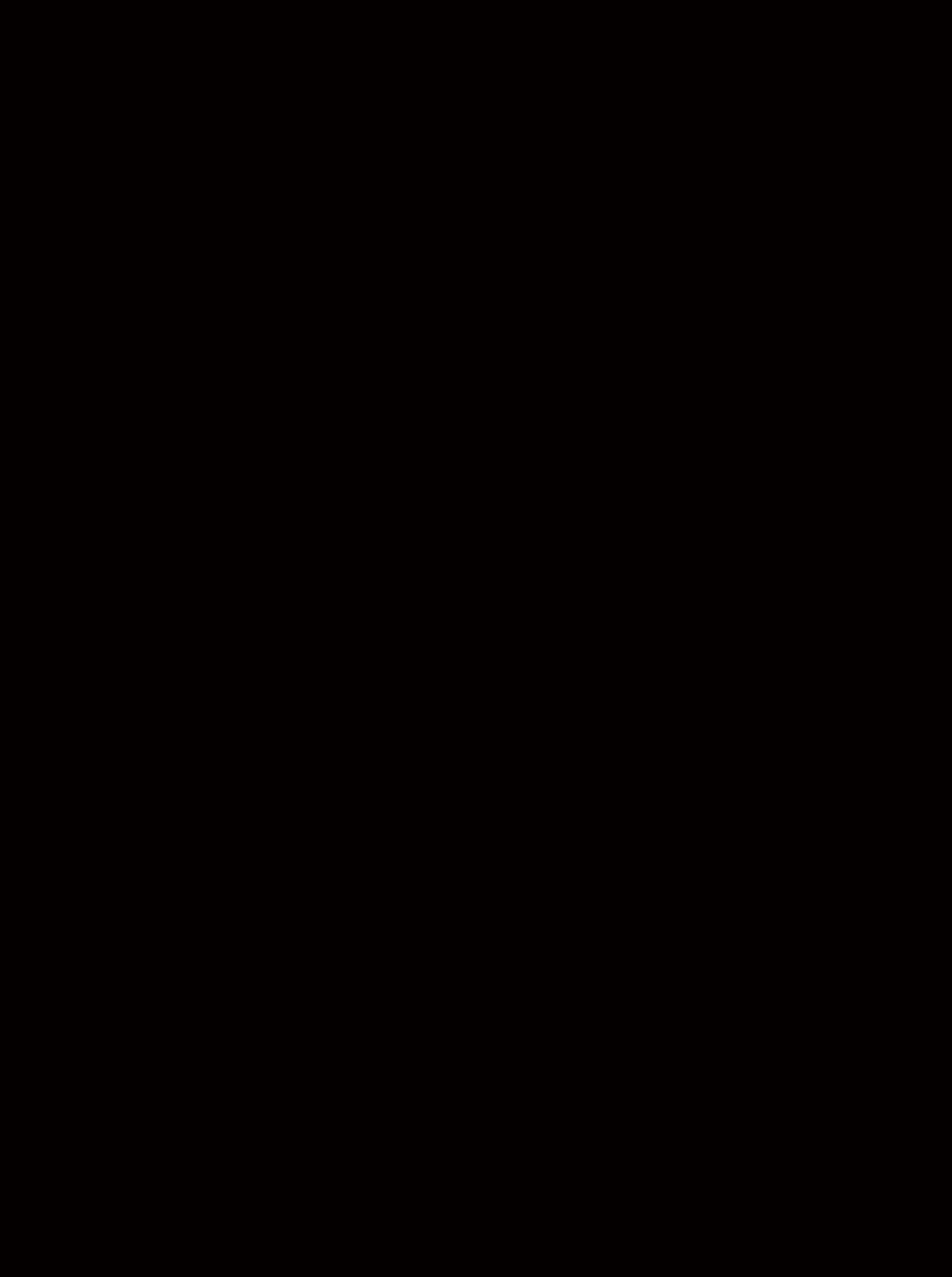


The Cod (*La Morue*)









## About the Artist



Diane Landry was born in 1958 in Cap-de-la-Madeleine, Québec. She received a BA in Visual Arts from Laval University, Québec, in 1987, and received an MFA from Stanford University, California, in 2006. She has exhibited and performed extensively in Canada and Europe. Landry's new work *The Magic Shield (Le Bouclier Magique)* opened at Oboro in Montreal in September 2005. Diane Landry lives in Québec.

## Credits

Diane Landry, *Flying School (École d'aviation)*, 2000  
Site-specific installation at Rice University Art Gallery, 2005

Diane Landry, *Mandala Naya*, 2002  
Site-specific installation at Rice University Art Gallery, 2005

Diane Landry, *The Cod (La Morue)*, 1997  
Performance at Rice Media Center, 28 October 2005

Rice University Art Gallery is located in Sewall Hall on the campus of Rice University, 6100 Main Street, Houston, Texas 77005, and on the web at [ricegallery.org](http://ricegallery.org).

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*Lighthouse (Le Phare)*, 1996  
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*Skate to Stay (Patin sur place)*, 1993 – 1995  
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