

An abstract artwork by Judy Pfaff. The composition features a central stack of approximately 15 white, slightly curved plates or shallow bowls, arranged vertically. A dark, gnarled branch or stick is positioned horizontally across the middle of the stack, extending from the left side towards the right. The background is a light, textured surface, possibly paper or canvas, overlaid with a dense network of thin, intersecting lines in various colors including yellow, orange, blue, and red. Some lines are straight, while others are curved or spiral-like. A single, solid dark blue circle is placed on the left side of the image, near the middle of the plate stack. The overall effect is one of layered complexity and organic form.

JUDY PFAFF

..... all of the above



..... all of the above

Rice Gallery
HOUSTON, TEXAS

FOREWORD

Although Rice Gallery is fortunate to have worked with many influential installation artists, when Judy Pfaff – a pioneer in the field and one of its most respected practitioners – accepted our invitation, we felt that something special had occurred. During her site visit in October 2006, Judy saw the gallery and exclaimed, “It’s the biggest little space I ever saw,” capturing perfectly the huge feel of our 40 x 44 foot “white box.” Judy returned to her studio in upstate New York, and for the next few months patiently addressed what seemed to be, I’m sure, a ceaseless stream of calls and emails from Houston: “What materials will you need, Judy?” “Can you give us some pictures of the work in progress?” “When can we book your return flight?” One day we got Judy’s best answer in the form of the title, *all of the above*, an idiom Judy uses often. Connoting a wide sweep of possibilities, it was a perfect choice for an artist whose work thrives on the complexity of life and fluidity of the creative process. Judy enters an exhibition space not knowing exactly what will happen, and like a seasoned athlete, relies on knowledge, skill, and experience to carry her through. Her process is gutsy and fluid; there is no fallback plan.

Judy arrived at Rice in January, and as soon as her substantial studio away from home – tools, welders, raw materials, broom, and coffeepot – had been set up, she began to define the space she had so accurately assessed months earlier. Using an ink-dipped rope like a chalk line, she snapped long marks onto the walls, working her way around the gallery. Then for the next three weeks, with her assistants and Rice Gallery preparator David Krueger, Judy created, added, subtracted, hoisted, balanced, and stretched the installation’s components until she had transformed the space, as one visitor later wrote, into “a 3-D drawing, interesting from every angle.”

I would like to thank our patrons and members who provide the major support for Rice Gallery exhibitions, as well as two Houston foundations, The Eleanor and Frank Freed Foundation and Nightingale Code Foundation for their generous support of Judy Pfaff’s exhibition. Special thanks go to Judy’s assistants, Max Juren, Dave Lewis, Ryan Muller, and especially to wonderful Kate Hodges for her logistical help as well as her talent for keeping things on an even keel.



Tools and materials Judy Pfaff brought to Houston for *all of the above*

Having Judy Pfaff create an installation is a milestone for a gallery specializing in installation art. The chance to get to know Judy and to see her at work was a gift. Judy is an amazing artist, but also, as we learned, a person of great character and integrity. She came to Houston weighed down by winter and the accumulated grief of having lost, in 2006, three of the most important people in her life. She could have cancelled, but she didn’t; instead she came and worked straight through that first week despite being ill. No matter what was asked of Judy she remained generous and in good spirit throughout. We hated to see her leave, for as we could have guessed but now know for sure, Judy is a pro, the Real Thing. For the unforgettable work of art she created here, and for (literally) all of the above – I thank her.

Kimberly Davenport
Director

Site Visit Interview, 27 October 2006

Kimberly Davenport: What are your impressions of the gallery?

Judy Pfaff: It's the biggest little space I ever saw. On paper, it's a reasonable, normal gallery size but in fact, it's massive. I think that's because it's got the glass, the foyer, and the stairs [outside leading to the plaza], so you slide straight through it. It's really *not* 44' x 40'; it is sort of like 44' x 2000' or something. It really has that long throw. Also, it pictures it [an installation] up like a painting; there's a way that box [the gallery] operates where it [the installation] really is an object in a certain way, or it's framed. So unless you create the meanders and slowdown the visuals, it [the installation] is seen as a whole instantly.

Do you have a pretty clear idea of what an installation will look like before you start constructing it in the gallery?

With my most recent show, *Buckets of Rain* [at Ameringer & Yohe Fine Art, New York], I didn't know what it was going to *look* like. I did know what it was going to *feel* like. Usually there is some bell that goes off in my mind, and it's like, this show will be about this, this show will be about that. What form it takes, what happens during making it, that's probably 30-40%, but usually I have a pretty strong idea of what it's going to be about.

Most sculpture now, even most really good sculpture, is really *understood*. It has a bright idea, a kind of confidence. I think most of the time my work actually scratches its way through, or it's additive. Usually it's slow, and it's sort of messy. So in a way, my stuff always looks more undone than most shows, more torn apart, chewed on. I think there's an elegance and a kind of corporate fineness to most pieces I see today. There's a really high degree of craft, skill, and knowledge of materials and things like that. I know a lot about materials, but they're [her installations] all handmade. So they're usually not as clean, I guess.

It must take an unbelievable amount of confidence to work that way.

It might even be the opposite. Actually, I am quite nervous, and get quite panicked, and don't know if anything is really going to work until I see it in place. I'm pretty good on my feet like, "Oh, that sucks." Mostly it's figuring out why this thing has lost energy, or why this other thing that is just a simple gesture has so *much* energy.

It's a little bit like when I get dressed in the morning. I think, "That's going to look right. It looked right a week ago." Then I put it on and it's like, no, no, no, the weather, the temperature, it's *something*. Something happens, so that no matter how well you plan it, at the last minute, you change those shoes. It's like you're the same person; you haven't gained weight; nothing really has happened much, but *right* is all about sensation.

Maybe it is about some kind of balance?

Balancing and figuring out. Also you've got to feel comfortable. You were feeling so great that last time when that outfit looked really good. You feel sucky this time, so that same outfit is going to look like it is on the wrong person. Something happens.



Gallery Talk and Q&A at the Exhibition Opening, 1 February 2007

Judy Pfaff: I didn't want to do this show. I had just done a show in New York a few months earlier, and it was kind of a requiem. My mother had died. My best friend had died. People were dying, and I was just a mess. Thanksgiving was coming. Christmas was coming. Winter was coming and I live in the Northeast so we were putting heating systems in the studio. I had graduating students to take care of because I teach at Bard. So this [opportunity to work at Rice Gallery] was one more thing. I think Kim [Davenport] had shown me pictures of the [Rice Gallery] space, and I thought, "Oh, that is fabulous. Of course I will do that." And then I [later] thought, "I don't want to do *anything*."

When I was sixteen I lived in Sweetwater, Texas. My memories of it are just disastrous. I had a motorcycle and long hair down to about here [*gesturing to her waist*], and I think they thought I was the strangest person on the planet. All I remember thinking is that everything you touched kind of hurt you, because it's pretty much the desert. When there was a storm it was red because of the dust, and there was a thing called heat lightning. Weather was weird in Texas then, and weather is still weird in Texas so I thought I would just start from that.

Judy Pfaff working on all of the above



Usually I need a narrative. They're [her installations] abstract, but they're really based on having something to build around. Now, I've been doing this for a long time, so there's always a lot of *stuff*. They're always not centered. They're usually a little random-feeling. But this weather thing began to fascinate me. It began a little bit with political things, like Katrina and the storms around the world. So what's nice about this simple little word [weather] is that it gathered a lot of tangents, which really thrills me. Now, I don't think this [installation] is about weather particularly, but it started from there. It does sort of have its own systems involved, and there are pockets of things, and moments where it's warmer or cooler, or wilder or calmer. So in that way, it fits with my formal language.

I was raised as a student of abstract expressionism. My teacher, friend, and mentor, Al Held, we shared a lot in common with really loving a level of complication, and I think he always felt he was misunderstood. I'm very similar. I always think no one sees all this thinking that's going on [in an installation], because it just looks so fast, or slipshod, or whatever the words are. I think I'm thinking a lot – I'm saying that to get on record. But it's also a lot of fun with a great crew, a great space, and weird weather to egg me on. It was a wonderful experience.

Questions from the Audience

How long did it take?

Too long, too long. These vines are wild grape, harvested from the wilds of Tivoli, New York, on my property. I have five acres. I know that sounds like nothing here [in Texas], but it's major there. The steel is white: what looks heavy is light; what's light is heavy. This stuff [the grape vines] is actually quite light, but it will kick you. It has a lot of internal energy. It wants to go back into the tree that it came from. We were here almost three weeks.

Do you make models?

No! No! No! Models are the bane of my existence. I did an opera set for the Frank Gehry building at Bard College and the director, producer, lighting person, and choreographer wanted to see the model. So I made them a model that had nothing to do with what I did because I thought, "Well, that will settle them out." It made them completely bonkers.

I did practice [this installation] because Kim needed a photograph [for the exhibition announcement], and I thought, "I don't really make installations for myself. They're a real drag, and they take up your space." So we [Pfaff and her assistants] just randomly made one in the studio – it was sort of funny – it was like, "Okay, we got discs. Put them over here. We got rings. Put them over here." And it actually looked like the show, which I thought was sort of funny. But it was very fake. So, no, I don't make models.

I make drawings, but there's no equivalence. It's not like this drawing is this thing. They're messy in the same way the show might be messy, or they might be formal in the way the show might be formal, but there's no direct relationship.

How do you start an installation?

I start badly, slowly, and you can ask anyone who works with me, I stall a lot, and I circle making a decision. I'm like a terrible student who does it at the last moment. This one [. . . . *all of the above*] started by my thinking, "I've got so many vines around the house; I should use them." Then we decided to paint them black. Now, painting these black was mind-boggling. First, I had them all dyed, but the dye wouldn't take. Then we used mimeograph ink, which is horrible, but we found gallons of mimeograph ink on the property, so I thought, "Well then, that must be right for that." We started with the vines and by setting up a language, the language meaning hard, soft, black, white, fast, slow. There are a lot of little, internal stories that please me, stories that no one needs to know.

Have any of your installations ever completely failed and you reached a point and said, "This is just not going to do," or do you always work it out?

That's an interesting question. I will tend to really try to work it out. I get a little desperate. Twice I have had a show open and I came back the next week, tore it apart and remade it. Twice. One was in the Albright-Knox Museum, and one was at my gallery, Holly Solomon. If it's dreadful, it's too embarrassing to leave it. But for me, there's a set of things. Like, what I like about this piece was not this weather thing, but that it has a great spin, meaning it really has a centrifugal-ness, the way the lighting sort of peeks through. So there are layers of things that come about.

The reflection in this window: I was actually very nervous about the transparency of this gallery, which you would think given my work would be a pleasure. You're on parade here. It is so bizarre. I work sort of publicly, but not through a lens quite like this. But now that whole flow in and out is perfect. I have to grow into the space because initially I come in and I say, "It doesn't have this. It doesn't have that." There are complaints, you know, I'm a New Yorker, that's what we do. And then I fall into it. At the end, I will make it happen even if it doesn't happen at the opening. It's a little bit like *Beat the Clock* [1950s television show] or a marathon, where sometimes you are so exhausted you don't know what you've done.



Materials

polycarbonate plastic on windows

silicone adhesive

colored Plexiglas strips

birch board plywood (Baltic birch from Russia)

Styrofoam discs cut from extruded polystyrene foam insulation

joint compound and plaster (two different materials)

white, flat acrylic paint watered down and applied thinly to birch plywood

black dye on concentric black circles cut from Baltic birch

white, flat spray paint (Kilz brand) on twisted steel rod

twisted steel rod shaped with acetylene torch

grapevines brushed with mimeograph ink

extending from vines: theatre/photographer's black foil and black rubber tubing filled with dye

yellow and orange fluorescent colored string

black string dipped in dye

fixtures: eyehooks, pulleys, and cleats

electroluminescent wire (small string lights called EL wire)

lights: fluorescents, black lights, electroluminescents, various bulbs

colored UV Plexiglas (fluorescent to the edges)

dye: applied to wall with snap lines of string and rope

rubber tubing

fan: domestic

antique umbrella frames

large fishing weights in shapes of drops

cannonballs cast by artist using antique molds

adhesive colored tapes: opaque and transparent, some fluorescent; cut to specific shapes and applied to floors, walls, and strings

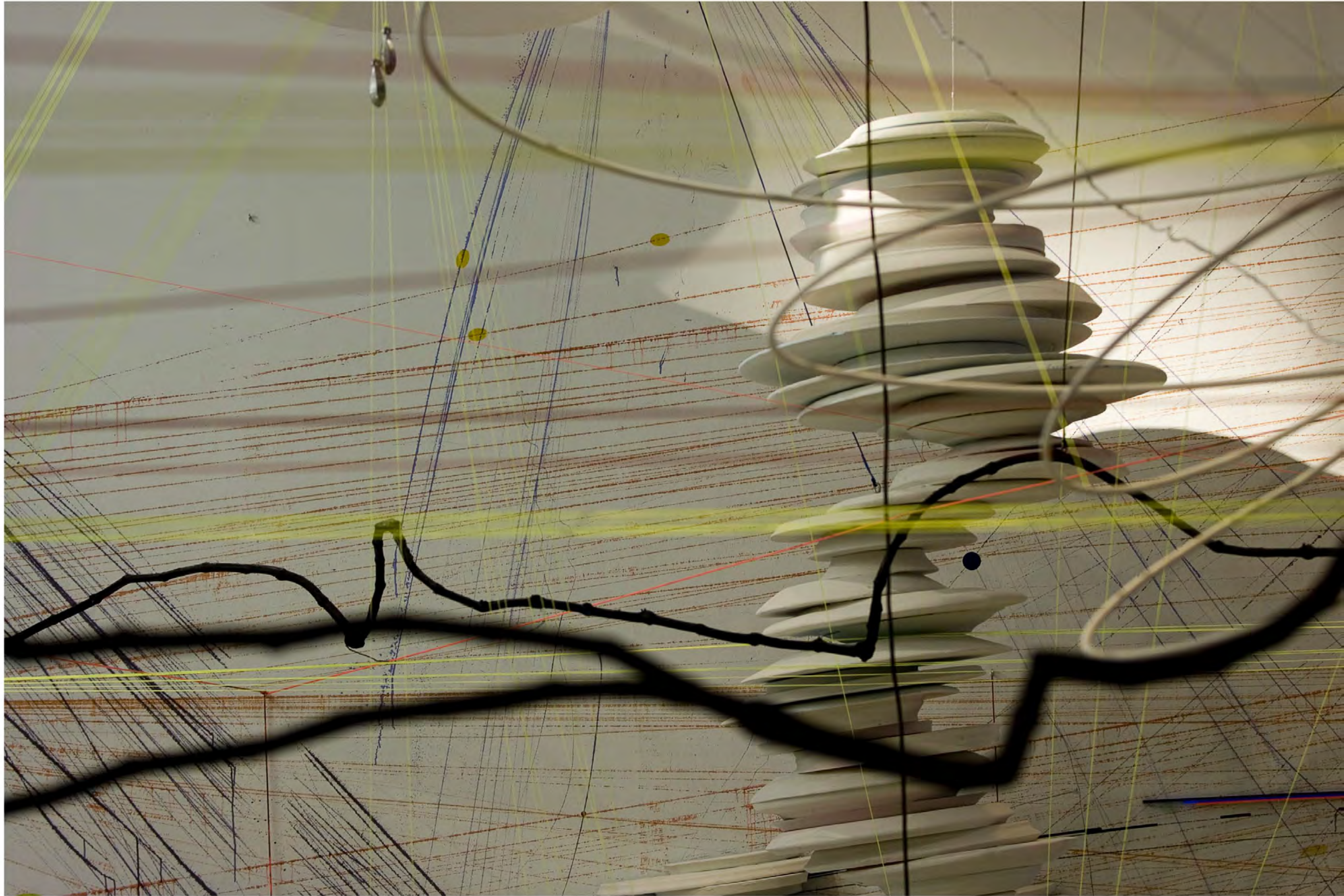






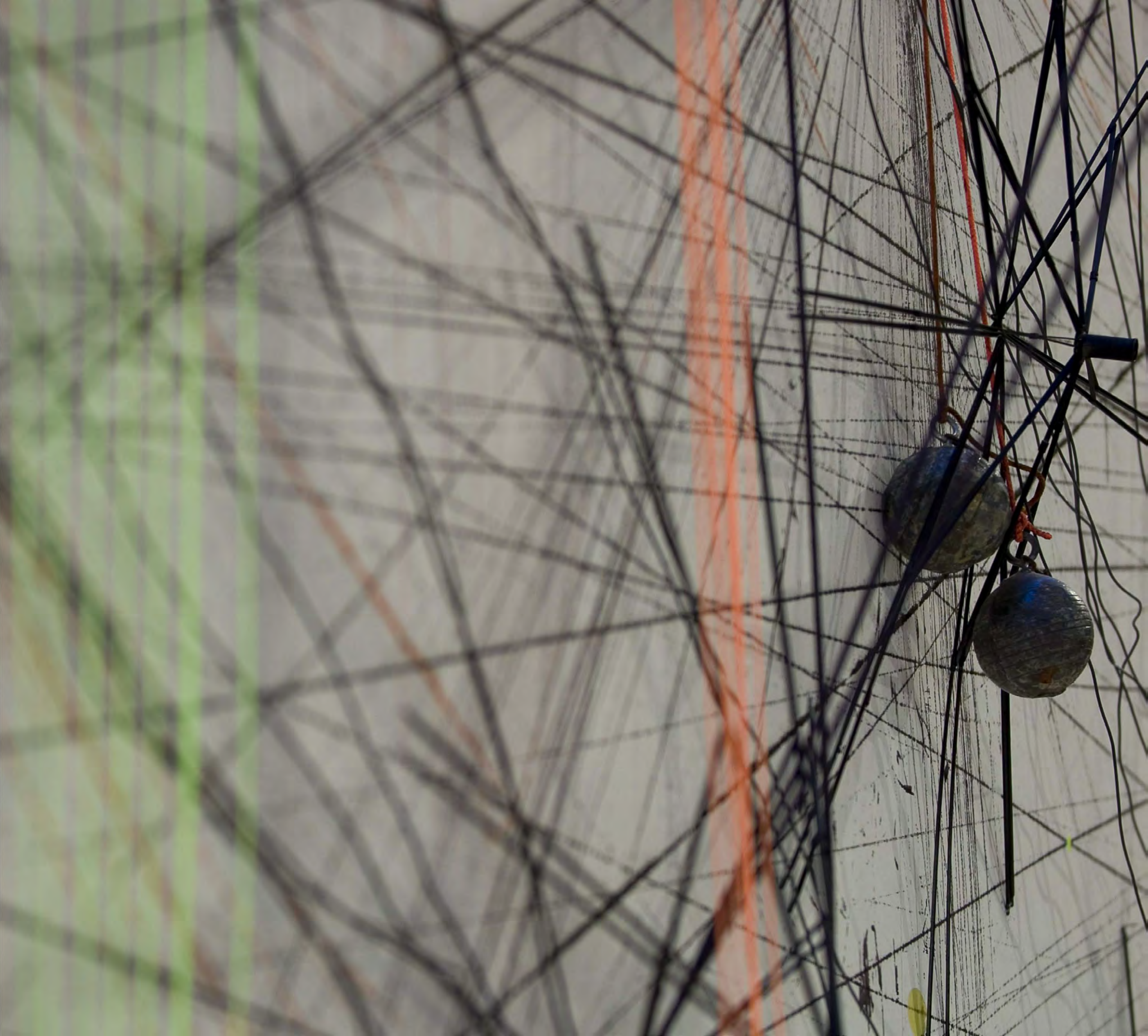




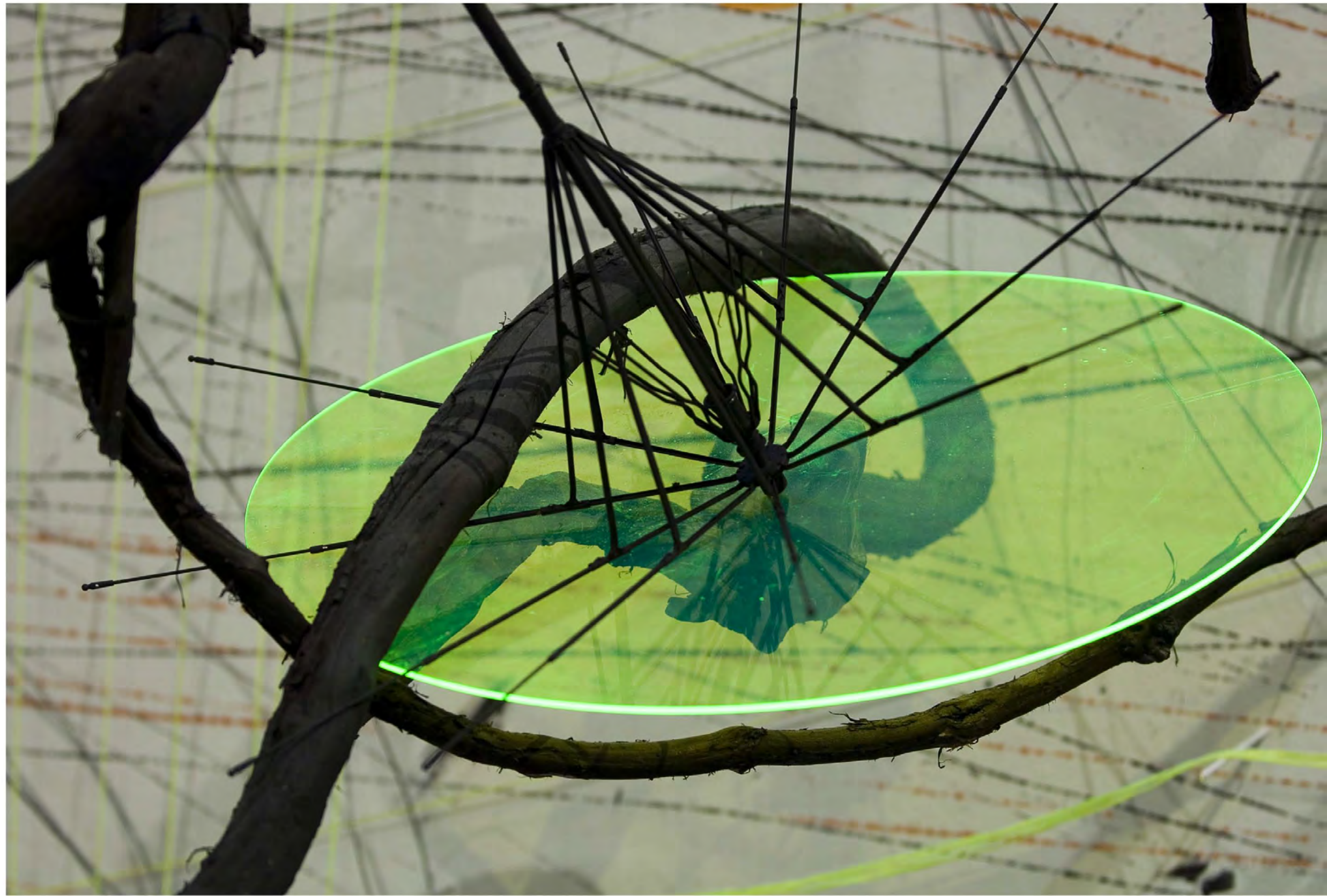


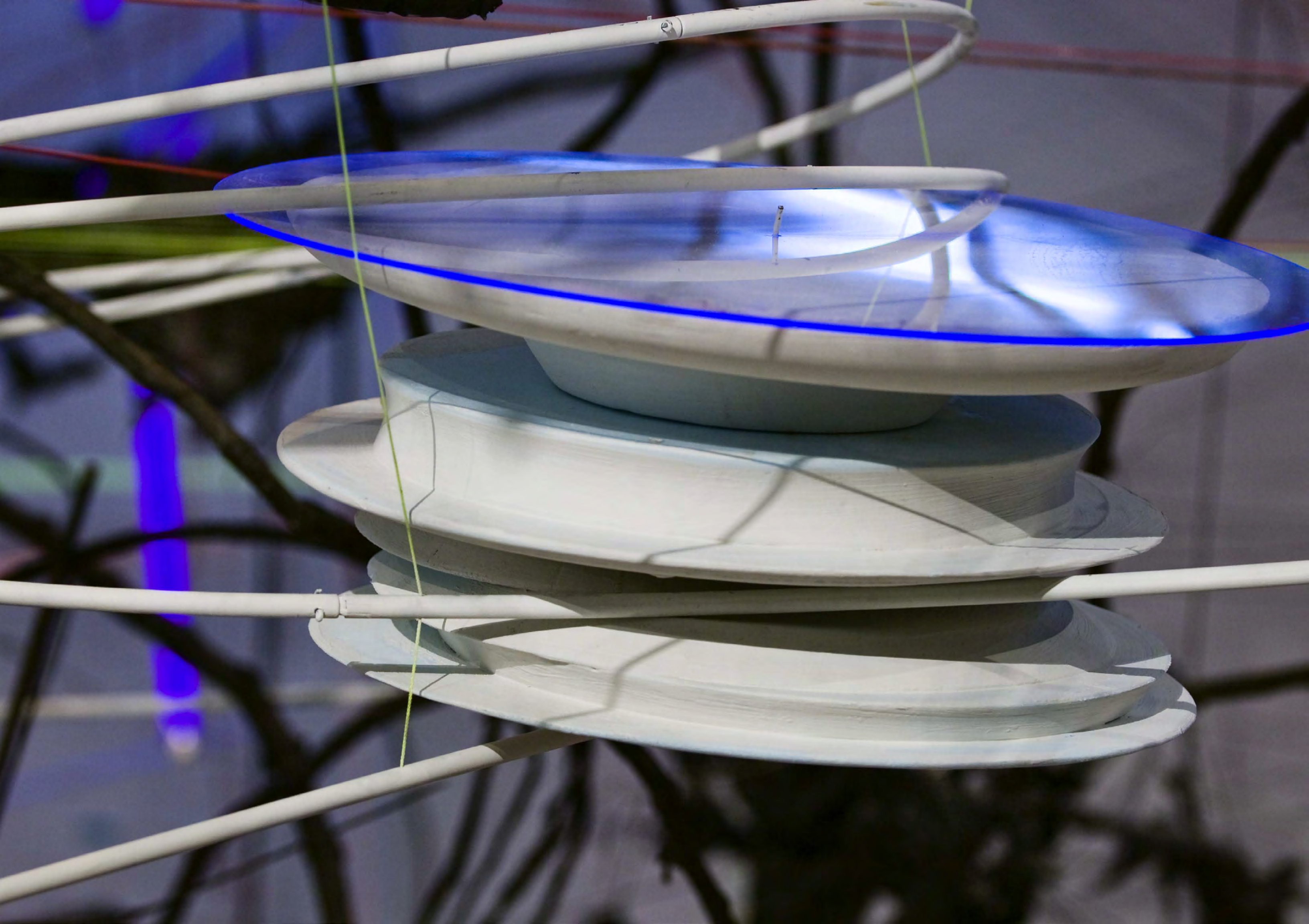


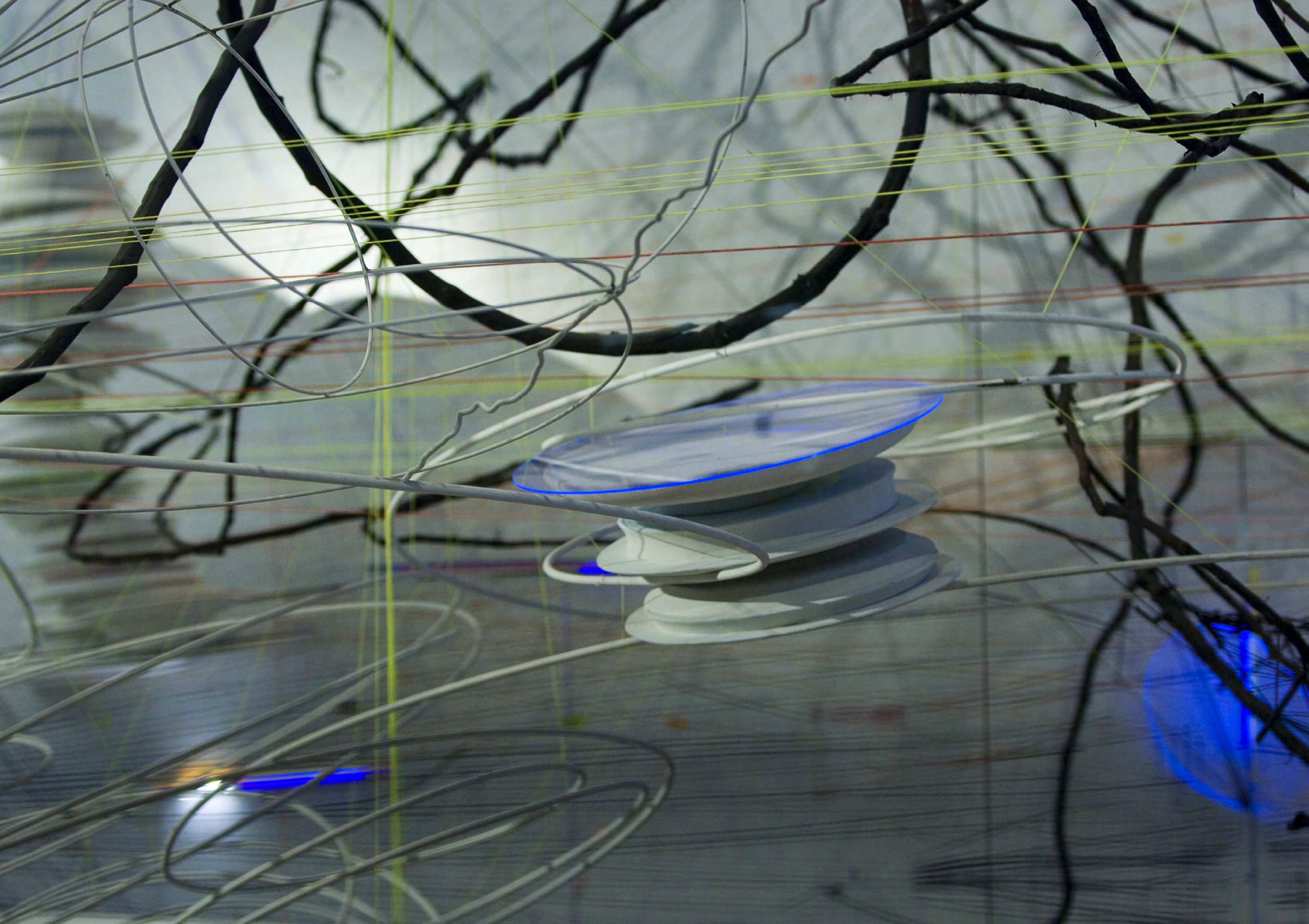


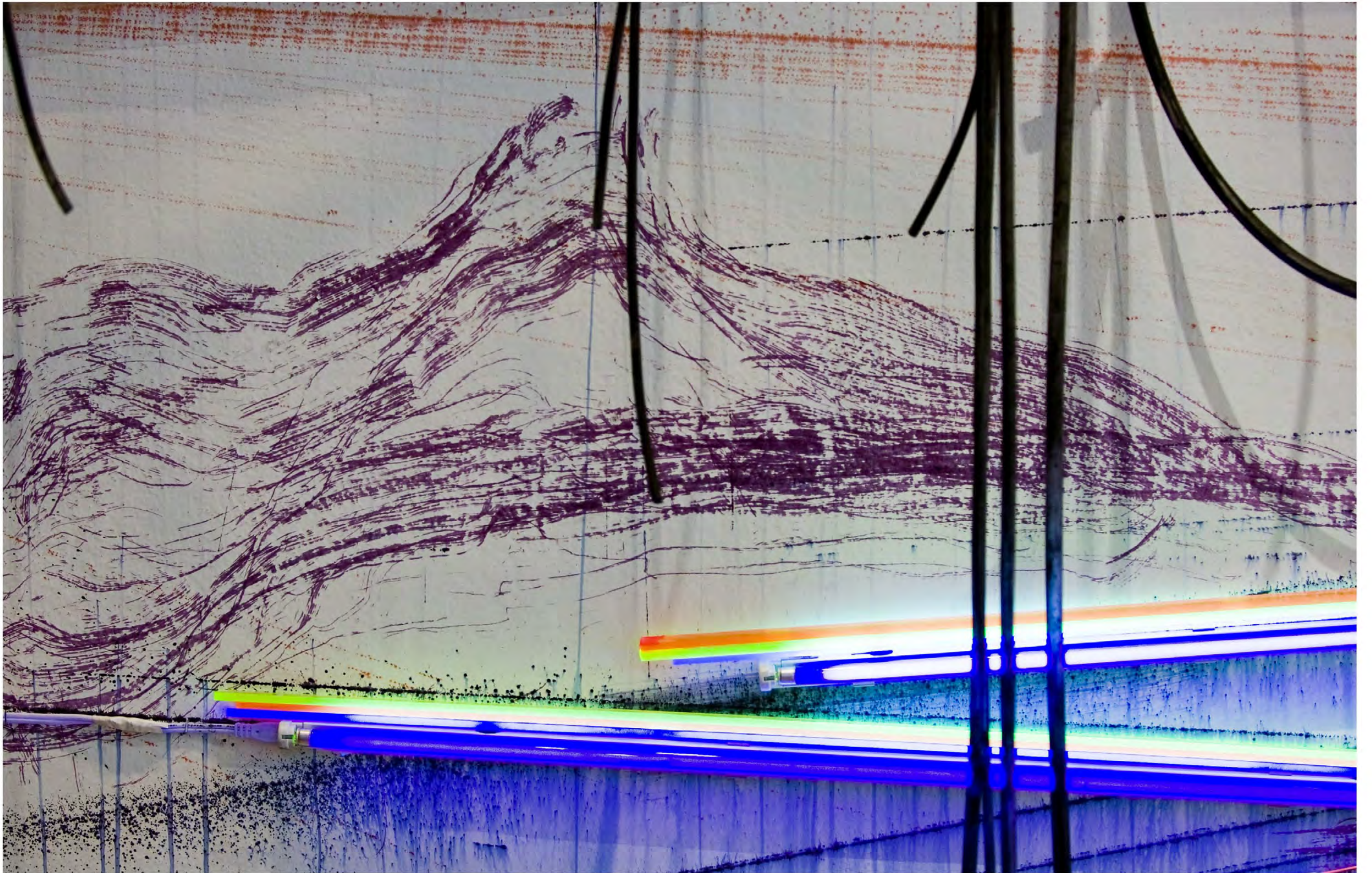


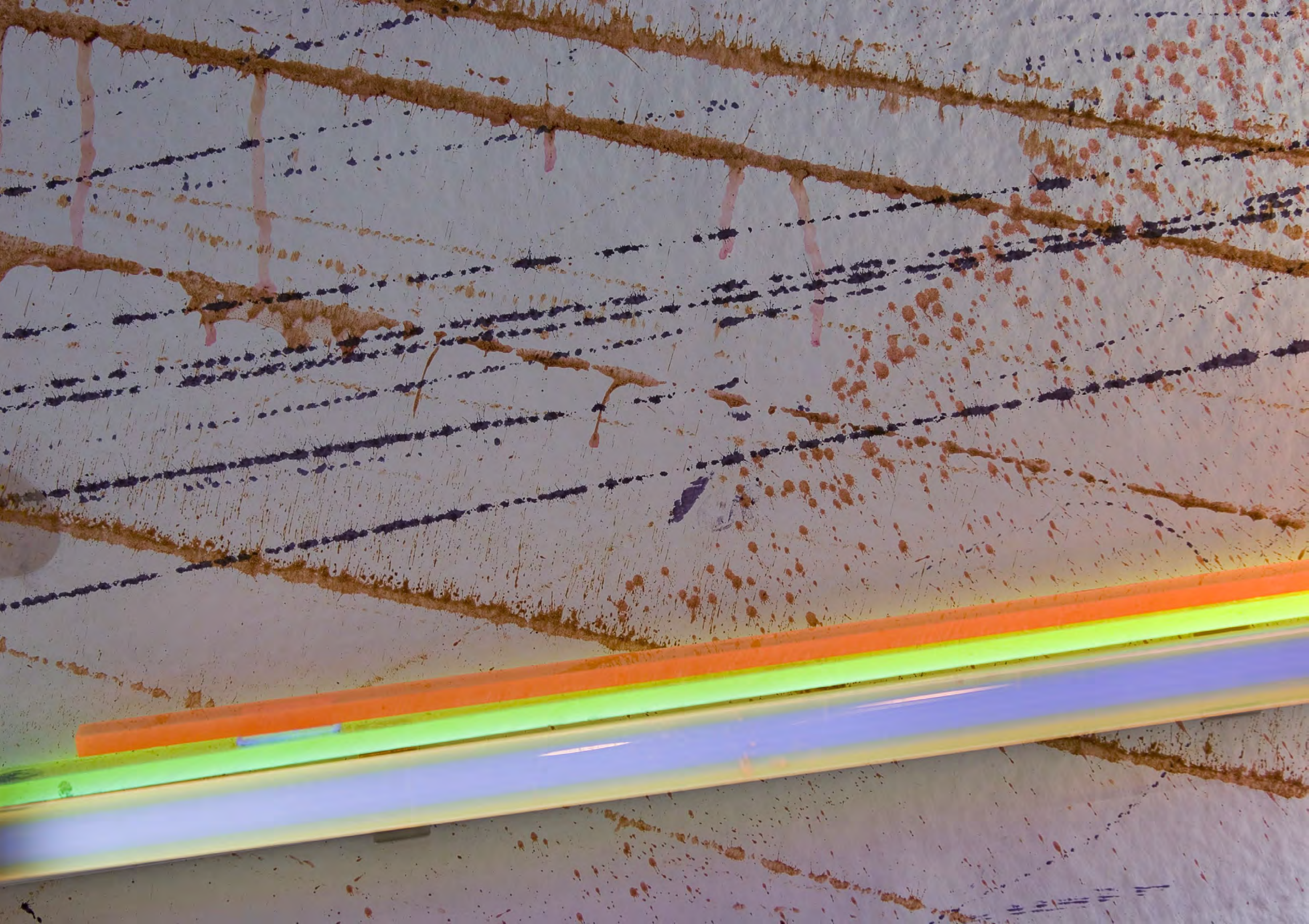














ABOUT THE ARTIST

American artist Judy Pfaff was born in London in 1946 and lived there until she moved to Detroit in 1958. She received a BFA from Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri in 1971 and an MFA from Yale University in 1973. A sculptor, installation artist, painter, and printmaker, she has exhibited in museums and galleries worldwide. Recent solo exhibitions and projects include, *Buckets of Rain*, installation, Ameringer Yohe Fine Art, New York (2006), *Regina*, commissioned set design for American Symphony Orchestra, The Richard B. Fisher Center for the Performing Arts at Bard College, Annandale-On-Hudson, New York (2005), and *En Restauro*, installation, Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA), University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia (2004). In 1999, Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, New York, awarded Pfaff an Honorary Doctorate, and in 2004, the John D. and Katherine T. MacArthur Foundation named her a Fellow. MacArthur Fellows are recognized for "extraordinary originality and dedication in their creative pursuits." Judy Pfaff is the Richard B. Fisher Professor in the Arts, Bard College.

Judy Pfaff, *all of the above*
Commission, Rice University Art Gallery
1 February – 1 April 2007

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.

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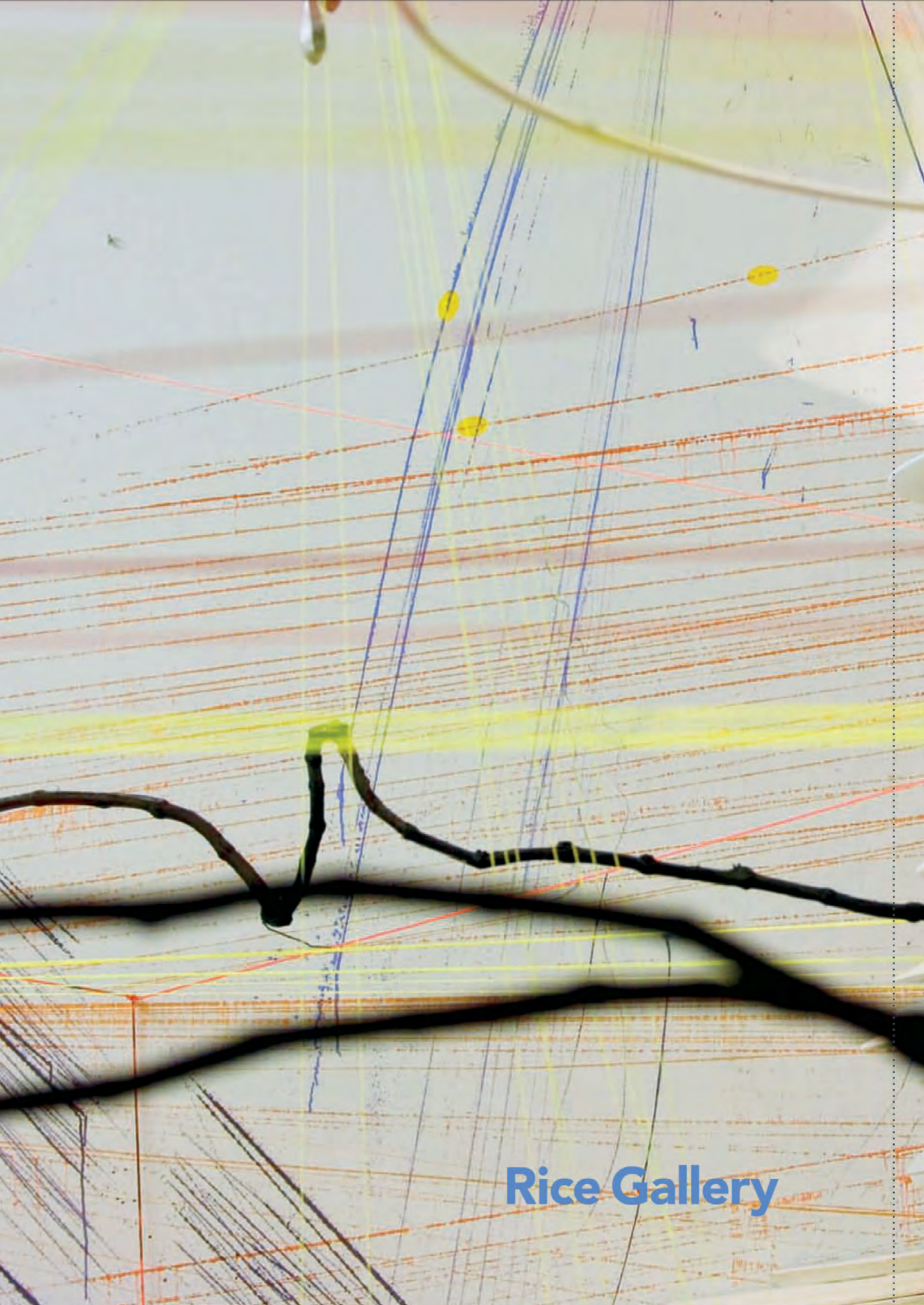
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Page 5

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