

A conversation between Eva Löfdahl and Stephen Lichty

10/11/17 Eva Löfdahl:

Hello Stephen. I am walking the Ridgeway path in England. Will be in Stockholm on Friday. Status of the project: several threads, no fixed idea. Gianluca suggested, you might not agree, that a written dialogue between us could be part of the small catalogue. Best wishes from Avebury.

10/11/17 Stephen Lichty:

Will you travel all 87 miles? I will love to hear your report from the ground. I am open to communicating about the project by email. First though, I want ask how communicating about work that you are developing affects your process; what are your preferences around discussing and disclosing ideas in process?

10/17/17 EL:

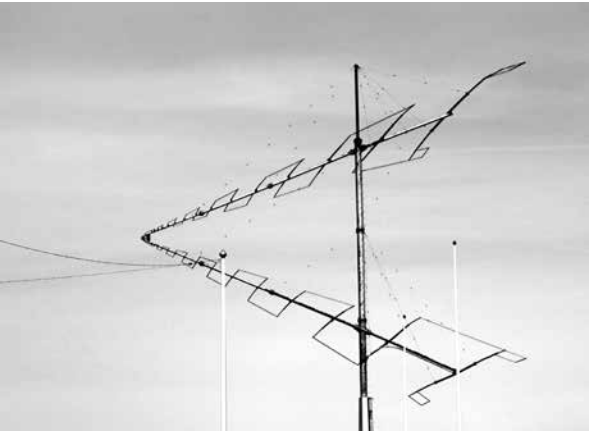
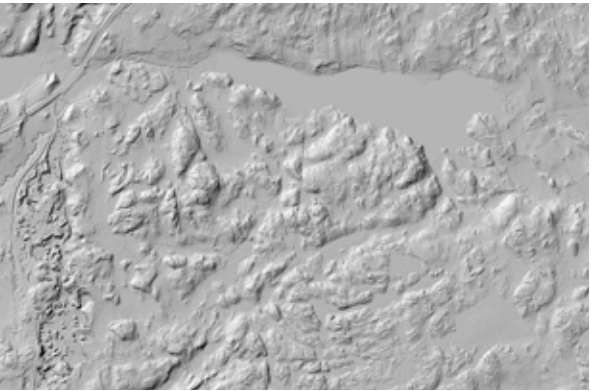
I am back in Stockholm now. The Ridgeway walk was about 160 km. As the name says, there is a ridge, of chalk. It has been the most suitable way to travel from the Stone Age and on. The ground is well drained and it has no dense vegetation. There are many traces of activities. Huge earthworks, Grim’s ditches 6 km long with high walls, a series of hillforts able to contain whole villages; in Avebury already, the Romans destroyed the magic of the place by making a road crossing in the central ring of stones, but it is still very impressive.



I don’t know how communication affects my work process because I have almost never pursued it in process. I have felt it easier to change my mind, let it jump, if I don’t have to explain why. But I think this work will be about communication, so I may try.

One thread is about paths. Over time I have tried to read on the subject, but these texts tend to go in either of two directions, either a Situationist drift towards getting lost or an accumulated overlay of songline-like narratives. And I am not onto a religious path, if it sounds so, but something much more practical, basic and existential, to find the best way.

Besides my field practice of trekking, which has never directly led to any artworks, I have been in contact with the Agricultural Department of the University of Uppsala to get laser scan maps. Looking at these is like looking at Mars, but it is easy to find marks of water and civilisation.



Another thread is antennas. This summer I saw one I thought had an interesting structure, which possibly could be used for an installation. So far this idea has not taken off. Instead, it transformed into chopped bat-like umbrellas with safety pins. Handy, but too thin to be seen at a distance.

10/18/17 SL:

What a road Eva; I pictured more density. First, I want to respond to your comment that discussing work in process has been at odds with the freedoms of non-communication and changing your mind. That position makes sense to me; sometimes I feel like a traitor when I talk about my own work. I like to imagine there's a difference between the work and the discourse. I'm not sure why I feel that way, but I do. All that is to say that I don't anticipate causality or even correlation between what we discuss and what you end up making. It can take years to process a conversation anyways.

The LIDAR rendering looks windy! I searched for how LIDAR images are made- a laser bounces down to collect topographic points, and neighboring data-points can be interpolated to reach below the canopy.

The antennae photo you sent has a very different scale. An interesting aspect of antennas is that I have no way of knowing, by looking at them, if they are working or not. I suppose they are always working by virtue of being, and it's more a questions of whether or not the signals get processed.

Today I wrote a friend to ask if he knows of additional writing about paths or trails. I wonder if he might get back to me with something like, 'the trail is the text.'

10/19/17 SL:

Eva, a reply from Alex regarding trails:

10/18/17 Alexander Galloway

yeah i think you have the main ones covered [Situationist "getting lost" texts, overlapping narrative "songline" texts, and religious journey texts]... the only other thing that comes to mind is the Heideggerian

"weg" / pathway stuff. although that might ultimately fall under your third category of mystical journey. and you might be able to add D&G nomad stuff as a fourth category. exodus/migration/the "war machine"/etc..

i'll admit that i have set out in the past on trails expecting to emerge with some rich theoretical conclusions about them, while after many miles garnering only a few half-formed ideas. i think it activates a different part of your brain or something. i was hoping to write something about trails as media. but i only have very foggy notions at the moment. here are some thoughts...

- trails *are* technologies and can be analyzed as such -- most important point to make methinks.
- trails are for people. but they're also for animals and "elemental" things like water and wind (erosion etc). sometimes a single trail serves all three, sometimes the different trails cross each other (ex: animal trails intersecting people trails).
- trails are about repetition and non-choice. i.e. you *follow* a trail. (i mostly disagree w/ the SI/drift stuff here.)
- trails have to be maintained. but they are also maintained simply through use, and thus are "self-jigging."
- trails respond to topology (not always but usually) meaning they respond to inflection points in the landscape, not to any sort of universal euclidean grid. a ridge line, a valley floor, a saddle/notch/pass. trails will follow these inflection points or they will connect between them. (this is maybe evidence for trails being deleuzian.)
- trails "choke down" in narrow sections but also expand in open savanna sections. i.e. trail legibility waxes and wanes depending on topology. (this is most true for animals: they essentially don't have trails until the landscape gets difficult. then trails form at these choke points.)

10/23/17 EL:

Many things to respond to. I don't know if path is a good theme; it could be exactly as foggy as your friend said, but I will continue on that trail a bit. I agree that most trails don't follow the shortest distance between two points (either by map or Euclidean grid). Often

the organizing principle is to use the least energy. Animal trails are very level; they don't change altitude unnecessarily. There are different degrees of resistance when moving, not only depending on topography but also on vegetation and ground structure. I can imagine this mapped. Topologically?

I have just learned that inflection point is where a curve turns (e.g. from concave to convex). I think inflection point also can be a shift in energy. This aspect of topology says more about the intensity of use related to space, convergence, and diffusion. I have been very happy to reach "inflection points"- when there haven't been any marks of a trail for a long time and one suddenly appears.

Ridgeway was different though, more of a legal pattern. I am used to the "right to roam"- one can walk everywhere except into someone's garden and over fields with growing crops. In England the "right of way" is restricted to the public footpaths. The paths are very straight because they mostly followed property lines. Nowadays they sometimes cross fields. Behind the trees at the bottom of the field, there is a 10th century church. The line of the path may well have been established then.



As you say, just by looking, it is hard to say if an antenna works. When I was searching for different kinds of antennae I came across an article about how to use your TV antenna to improve 3G reception. The thought was to use harmonious under-frequencies, multiples of the intended wavelength. No idea if it

works, but transposing was attractive (on an imaginary level).

10/26/17 SL:

I've been thinking about your take on inflection points and energy. Topology seems very complex, but important to sculpture. According to topology, a coffee mug with a handle is the same as a donut.

I watched one video today about bodies, space, time, and gravity that really moved me. The demo models gravity. My favorite part is when one small marble orbits another as the two orbit another body in the field... like our moon, earth, and sun. Another highlight is the figure-eight orbit of a marble between two equally large bodies in a field. It is so easy to be impressed by science demonstrations, and less easy to wrap my head around the same phenomena happening in the world.



This evening I will see a dance by Simone Forti, Steve Paxton, and Yvonne Rainer. Most of the questions I encounter with sculpture I also find in dance. Drawing, however, and the question of line throws me for a loop.

11/10/17 EL:

I have been silent a while. Starting a new idea has occupied my mind. So far there are two components, poles with sheets on top and "pillows" on the floor.

In writing it is sometimes difficult to understand how literal to take your words, e.g., "Drawing, and the question of line throws me for a loop."

Try this: stand in a room with at least six, seven meters free space. Tilt sideways until you lose balance, compensate with body movements by moving in that direction. Regain balance, you are not meant to fall, then immediately tilt the other way, and so on. Continue. After some time you can carry on without effort. Music and a glass or two may help to get started.

Alcohol is absolutely not advisable in the next situation. This could go wrong anyway. Stand in front of a field of semi-big stones, a glacial deposit, or a stony shore. Tilt forward. Just a little bit off balance and you will be able to cross quite fast. Otherwise, if you start to think about it, there are so many possible ways to put your feet that you will be stuck for a long time. I am not interested in losing control but in this other system. The first example was influenced by an experience of dance.

I have known about holes, the most accessible aspect of topology, for a long time. Once I did scientific illustrations. Those illustrations, flexible figures with holes and twists, have formed my idea of topology.



Seeing shape as irrelevant and grouping things according to their number of holes is fascinating, but so far this has not led me any further, unless understood in a very general sense as transformation or transfiguration



11/19/17 SL:

I just finished the first exercise in my studio. Between balance and imbalance, I noticed some body parts were left-behind; an arm didn't follow or my head flopped behind instead of going with the flow. I can imagine two likely reasons. The first is that I haven't been training lately and my body is not integrated with itself. The second reason is that "I" lacked commitment in the exercise. This second reason points back to the first- that I might commit with some parts of my body, but not others.

I've read about your incalculable stone-leaping problem in an interview with the philosopher/scientist David Bohm. Damon Zucconi introduced me to Bohm's work back in 2008; I recommend taking a look. Bohm framed the problem as related to the human-cultural tendency to see the world as divided into parts, instead of seeing it as whole. If we think of the stones as separate, it becomes more difficult to cross the stream than if we are tuned into the whole. Both of your exercises address the problem of parts and wholes. I encounter the problem of part and whole at every level of making and presenting sculpture in the world.

I want to quickly mention some evasive allusions I have from processing your images and writing: the site of the sleeping body and what happens inside and outside of it, the ancient and contemporary history of stacks/piles in architecture and sculpture, spatiotemporal composition in sculpture, drunken-style martial arts, and lastly, what Louise Bourgeois said about Brancusi's stacks that I can't remember (something about chairs).

11/24/17 EL:

The first balance exercise is definitely influenced by Alexander Technique. In the 1980's I had several dancer friends. They practiced AT and I saw many of their performances. I absorbed a certain dynamic, (later explained by mirror neurons) and just wanted to try. Quickly stepping over field stones came to me at a much later date, when I started trekking and realized that the same mechanism was released. We discussed dance and movement in Stockholm; the exercises help explain a possible extension of street level into VEDA, to trigger the impulse to step in and fall into some topography/topology.

All seemed very promising in-model. Now I have done some full-scale tests. Among maybe too many sticks and a bit depressed, I am bound to be down at the bottom, confused; this is not the position from which the work is going to be seen.

I have gradually realized how unaccustomed I am to inaccessible space and tableau settings. Many of my works rely on two approaches, both a quick distant

glance and a sort of presence, itch, or impulse when one comes close. The normal half-distance gaze has been the least rewarding.

So far I have been hesitant to stacking. Last autumn I saw the Brancusi studio in Paris. He has really taken putting things on top of each other far- plinth, element, object, sculpture. On the other hand, if not vertical, some intermediary half-art objects feel familiar (wall element, sculpture).

At the moment I am drawn to mega titles like, *The Earth, As We Know It*.



12/1/17 SL:

Eva, do you draw in the process of developing sculptures and exhibitions; if you draw, do you draw the field?

Inaccessibility, and the tableau situation... these are very consequential conditions at VEDA. The historical reason for the collapsed floor, the flood, is present as a nice kind of ghost in your model (the Florence flood water as negative space, below the platforms). Or maybe you did not intend to allude to the flood?

The Earth as We Know it, is nice; a gigantic moving target.

12/7/17 EL:

I don't know if what I last wrote seemed generally depressed, but it was about my struggle with working methods, something I don't usually share in such detail. Writing is slow and gives time for different interpretations, a richer communication. If we had been speaking, I think I would have first taken all exchange to a practical level. Writing in another language is also a little bit like operating from behind a glass curtain; I am not entirely responsible for what I say.

Even before I saw the VEDA space, I heard about the the flood and the 50th anniversary being celebrated by antiquarians. I find most direct references to historical events in artworks boring; I wouldn't think of doing that. But I can see in this case that I do express a sense of drowning. The unreachable vantage point and even the works to be are inaccessible behind glass, as a tableau. I don't mind if the flood is present in my work. Pressure and powerlessness come from the present world.

About the work as a moving target: within management, administration, and cultural theory, a moving target is regarded as one of the worst faults. But I like to think of an art project as a moving target.

I very rarely draw in the process of developing installations and exhibitions, I feel I don't gain enough knowledge or certainty. Rather, I use models together

with full-scale props, even at an early stage. Styrofoam is a favorite. (A floating material seems relevant to the real place too.) Otherwise, drawings are mostly notes to myself, or in some cases, done to clarify things I feel others have not understood.

I listened to a clip, David Bohm on "Wholeness and Fragmentation," a fragment indeed. Fragmentation has a specific meaning in the field of science and Bohm's involvement in the atomic bomb must have been an extreme burden. Wholeness as attitude is something to wish for. To look at the Earth, the World, as a whole.

If what we take in determines who we are, I take in too much. This idea is true, but also dangerous and connected to guilt infliction and sinister ideas of cleansing. (The next video on the sidebar was Mandelbrot images; after that the mantra "Ajai Alai", I chanted along for my radiant body.) Incoherence included in the wholeness.

After completing the 2004 Rock Art Expedition in the Libyan Desert, I read a lot about the oldest of visual expressions. Since not so much is known about the culture that produced them, one study approach (David Lewis-Williams) was to start from from what we have in common, the nervous system. For example, Lewis-Williams traced zigzag lines to entoptic phenomena, self-generated visions caused by exhaustion, migraine, and drugs. In some cases the connection seems plausible, but I think Lewis-Williams underestimated that the zigzag pattern is one of the easiest and most visually efficient things one can do, so people did.

More interesting, and on the theme of parts and whole, is the function of the posterior parietal lobe, the part of the brain that keeps track of parts and keeps us apart from them. When we exhaust this orientation area, or manage to block incoming impulses, our self-boundary weakens and opens to an experience of the whole. I think this area of the brain was both more in use and in rest, at the time when the rock paintings were done.

12/17/17 SL:

I've spent most of my life thinking that autonomy is virtuous, but for the last few years self-boundary concerns have me re-thinking my individual experience. Why ignore the interdependencies organizing behavior and everything that is common? I like your theory of zig-zags.

1/16/18 EL:

Now I feel more should be said about paths as technology. Because footpath networks are so concrete, Actor Network Theory fits too well and not so well. Animals, from elks and boars to ants are obvious co-creators. One might say that there are different overlapping networks, but I think they are hard to separate; all actors take part in path ecology, if only a small part. And not only living creatures; water runs in the path, as Alex also said, and erodes the path deeper and deeper into the ground- from mainstream media to hollow roads.

A sidetrack: Now is the time for publishing various statistics from 2017. The spring and summer were very dry; in some places the groundwater table was so low that they started rationing, which is very uncommon here in Sweden. Then, from the autumn on, the rainfall came and now the ground is extremely soaked. 2017 was a peak in wildlife accidents. This was explained by animals having to find new routes this year and moving differently.

Along the roads north of Stockholm are endless wildlife fences. While the animals have moved elsewhere, the fences pose a problem for walking humans. In November I was reckoning for a trek I will have in April. First I had to find a hole in the fence, mostly but not always there is a cut hole somewhere. Soon after I found it, I had to make a long detour because the valley I wanted to cross was flooded..

Channels and furrows continued: The effect of algorithms is more radical than what was even thought of in the 60's - 90's. I find that I often come to a field, mostly British, of natural scientists who later in their career become engaged in spiritual/new age/ odd questions. (Wikipedia may contribute to this

overrepresentation, but I don't see this phenomenon among Swedish scientists.) Anyway, I came across the concept of creode. "[C. H.] Waddington explains development with the metaphor of a ball rolling down a hillside, where the hill's contours channel the ball in a particular direction. In the case of a pathway or creode which is deeply carved in the hillside, external disturbance is unlikely to prevent normal development. He notes that creodes tend to have steeper sides earlier in development, when external disturbance rarely suffices to alter the developmental trajectory. Small differences in placement atop the hill can lead to dramatically different results by the time the ball reaches the bottom."¹

As I understand, this is about habits in evolution. The occurrence of some properties or functions is more stable, while others express a broader variation.

1/19/18 EL:

P.S. to my last mail:

On stone-leaping: I have started on a series of "drawings." A string dipped in paint is dropped or lowered on paper, vertical or oblique, by leaning the body a little. I control my movements but it is hard to foresee the result. Compared to the steady pace of walking this is a lot more active, curly and comical.

1/21/18 SL:

I've encountered a critique of chance operation (e.g. Cage scores) as another means of colonizing nature and the unknown. But what you are describing implies a tighter feedback loop; something more akin to walking as continuous falling.

What do these animal fences you are talking about look like? Are they electrified? Wire? I tend to keep questions open for extremely long periods of time, to the point that I lose interest in the problems in front of

¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Creode>, 16 January 2018

me, or the problems get distorted (this is one benefit of allowing abstract ideas to guide material decisions... one could be less likely to spiral into obscure or invisible configuration spaces that lead to personal preference-guided decoration).

1/31/18 EL:

Fences: here is photo of a hole, taken at the Finnish-Norwegian border. Same kind of fences around here, not impossible to climb, but very wobbly over the top, and one might also destroy the fence. I am standing on the Finnish side, property of the Finnish state (nature reserve or national park), and on the Norwegian side I am not sure (privately held by a Sami community?). The fence is probably for reindeer, but it also marks the outer border of the EU. I believe that the patching is done by a third party (official repair would have been a gate?) but known to all parties in the area. The path was there before the fence. For me, the parts of the installation are coming



together. The foam steps, Gianluca has found nice bamboo sticks, the lumpy knotty pillows, and the brush panel are part of a physical sensory system. The string drawings fit your negative description perfectly, “to spiral into obscure or invisible configuration spaces that lead to personal preference-guided decoration.” They are all about brain preferences, willingness to see patterns/figures.

2/5/18 EL:

It is interesting to see chance operation as a way of colonizing nature. I have used chance methods very little; once I picked random words. I had the idea or feeling, that I could do it only a few times a day, a moderate exploitation. I was treating chance as a limited but renewable natural resource, as in hunter-gatherer society. In popular thinking chance and good luck are also sometimes seen as a finite resource. Don’t stretch your luck. But contrary to the fulfillment of a special wish, I had no specific result in mind.

There is no pure chance. There are always frames and rules.

To the present drawings: The paper is on the floor, the string is the length from my hand to the floor. I can control speed, angle and viscosity of the dye, but everything goes so fast. I aim for the paper, which is rather small 30 x 23 cm. Sometimes most of it hits outside the paper. My first impulse to do this was that I wanted a component that was closer. The drawings could be for the intimate room beside the office.

The figures in these new drawings are unintentional; the mind needs so very little. Probably inspired from our writing about nodes and holes, I had beforehand made several holes in the paper to pin it to the wall, voodoo style.

2/21/18 SL:

Well, I am writing from Tokyo and I have a television on with the sound off; there was a big snow somewhere in Japan, the Olympic ski jump seems to have taken place, and there was a mass school shooting in Florida involving an AR-15. Earlier in our correspondence I referred to an artwork

or an exhibition as a moving-target. A target usually has a center, but after thinking thru your oeuvre, it occurs to me that maybe you don't think in terms of a center, but in some other ways when making or apprehending forms. Can you talk a bit about that? The title, *The World As We Know It*, at first seems targeted and full, but questions come up fast like, who are we, and what is it that we know? How?

Now, curling is on.



2/19/18 EL:

Curling seems to be the answer.

This week I saw a review of glorious moments in Swedish curling, e.g. team Anette Norberg’s gold medal in Vancouver 2010. With the last stone she shot away two or three Canadian stones. I certainly don’t imagine anything like that while working, but imagine an idealized run; aim, focus and hit. Then my interest

moves to what is going off in different directions.

An easily discernible object has more resistance and gives a better bounce.

Partly site specific, but not only, the title came from a dissociated position. I don’t know if I am part of the We. The title is a stone. Just to articulate a We is encouraging. The what and how questions must be left unanswered now.

* Curling: Hard work to steer destiny and I, the viewer see it all from above. I came to think of Fischli & Weiss’ title *Plötzlich diese Übersicht*² which always makes me in a better mood.

Under pressure to answer your questions I find a cup of coffee can create wonders and horror.



²Translation “Suddenly This Overview”











THE WHIRLING BOX OR FROM FOOT TO TOE

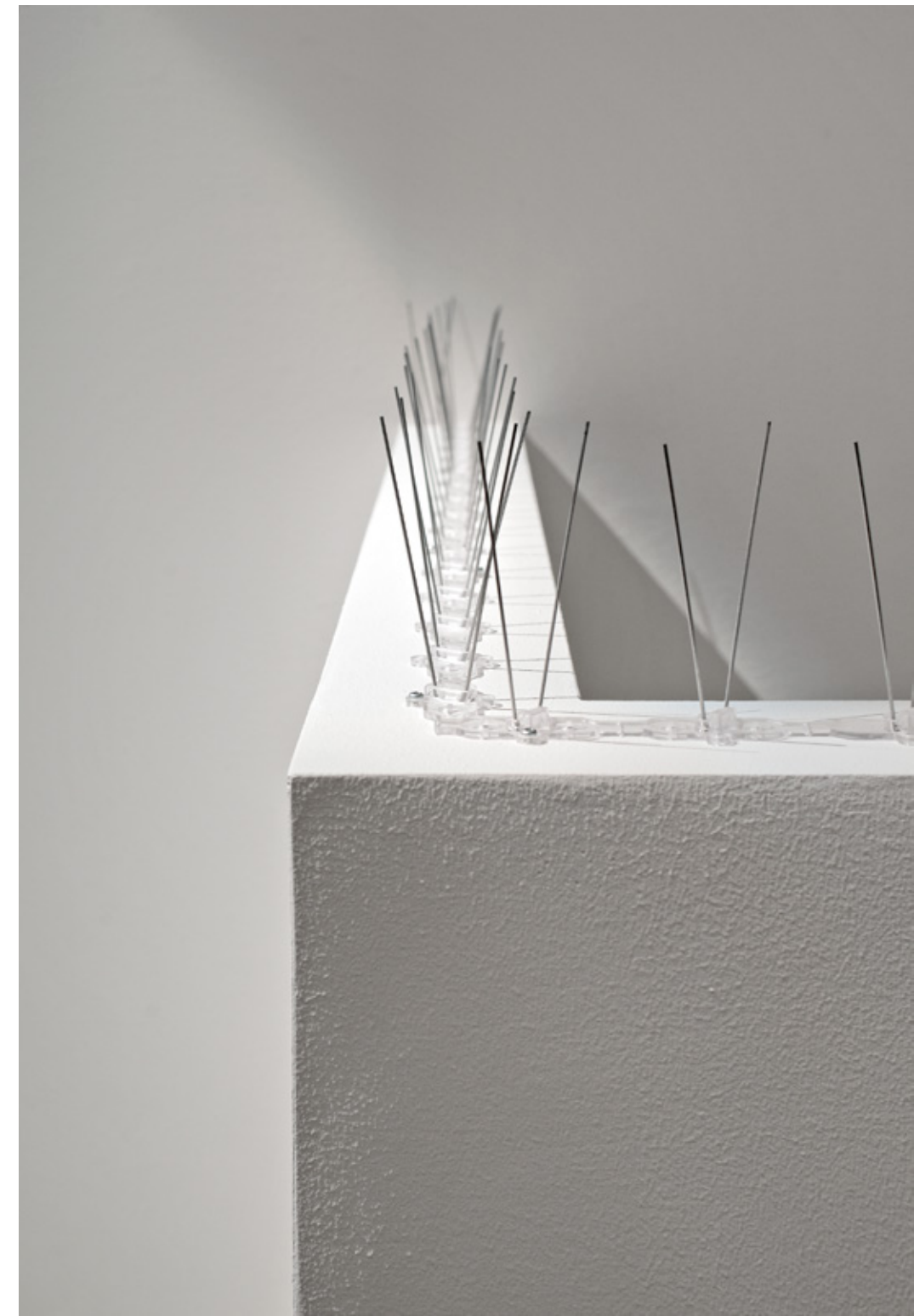
Moderna Museet, Stockholm, 2013





Installation view of The Whirling Box or from Foot to Toe







Modern Art, 1980
Acrylic on masonite, stone, 70 x 47 cm



Coral Islands for the Thirty Years' War 1993
Plaster, epoxy, aluminium, MDF, 4 parts: 27 x 94 x 58; 33 x 89 x 66; 27 x 100 x 78; 34 x 105 x 56 cm



Saturn, 1981
Mixed media on plywood and masonite, 2 parts: 70 x 42; 61 x 42 cm





Installation view of The Whirling Box or from Foot to Toe



Π AND AROUND

Lunds Konsthall, Sweden, 2009



Cloud to Be (detail), 2005-2009
 stone, plaster, aluminium foam, steel, 6 parts 30 - 130 x 25 x 30 cm



Cloud to Be, 2005-2009
 stone, plaster, aluminium foam, steel, 6 parts 30 - 130 x 25 x 30 cm



Cloud to Be (detail), 2005-2009
stone, plaster, aluminium foam, steel, 6 parts 30 - 130 x 25 x 30 cm



Ex True, 2005
concrete, aluminium, steel, 52 x 51 x 48 cm



Catch in orbit (1\4), 2003,
iron, pigment, glass fibre concrete.



Catch in orbit (1\4), 2003,
iron, pigment, glass fibre concrete.





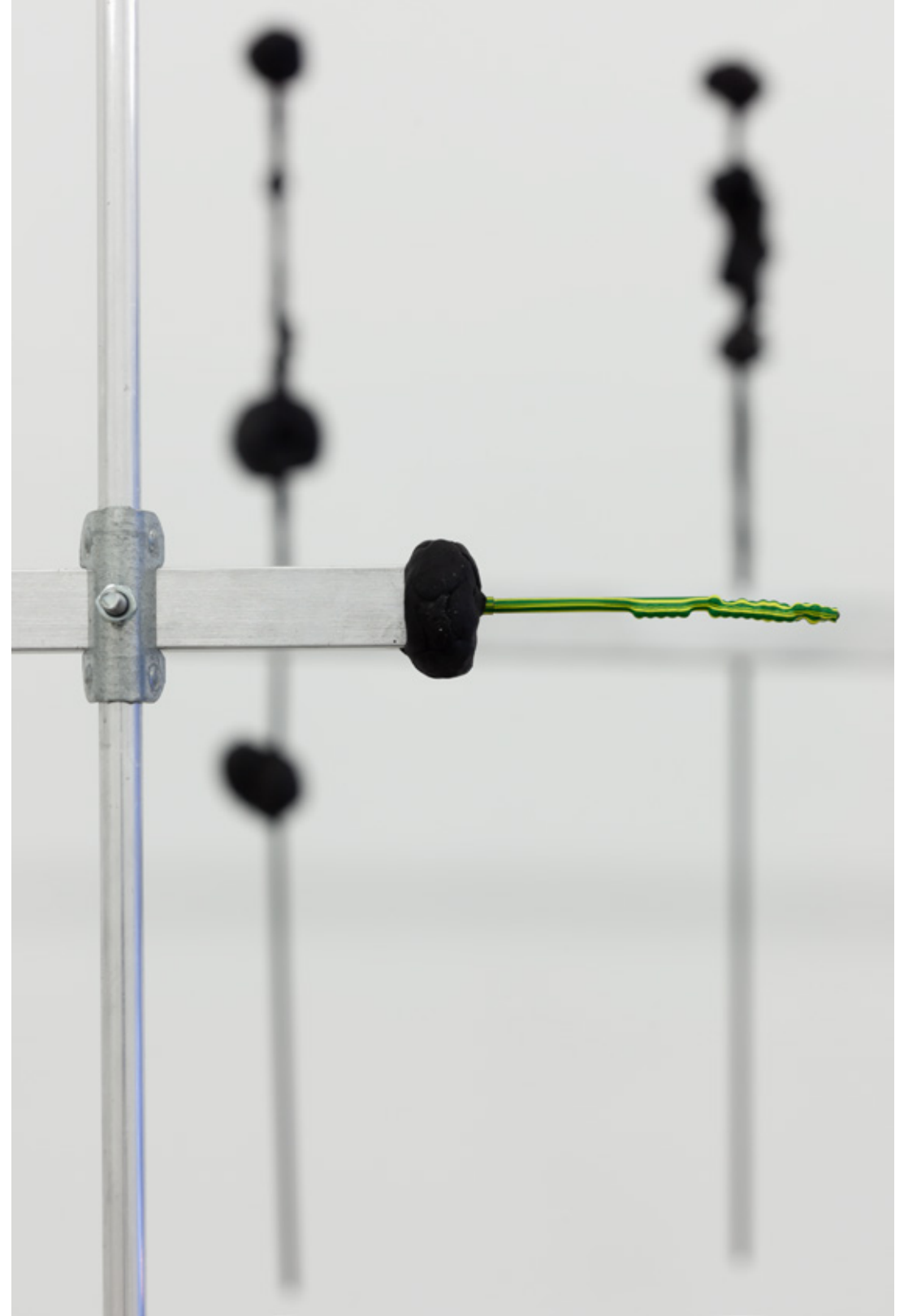
Untitled , 2009
Plaster, Styrofoam, powdered pumice, MDF



Untitled , 2009
Plaster, Styrofoam, powdered pumice, MDF

WORKS



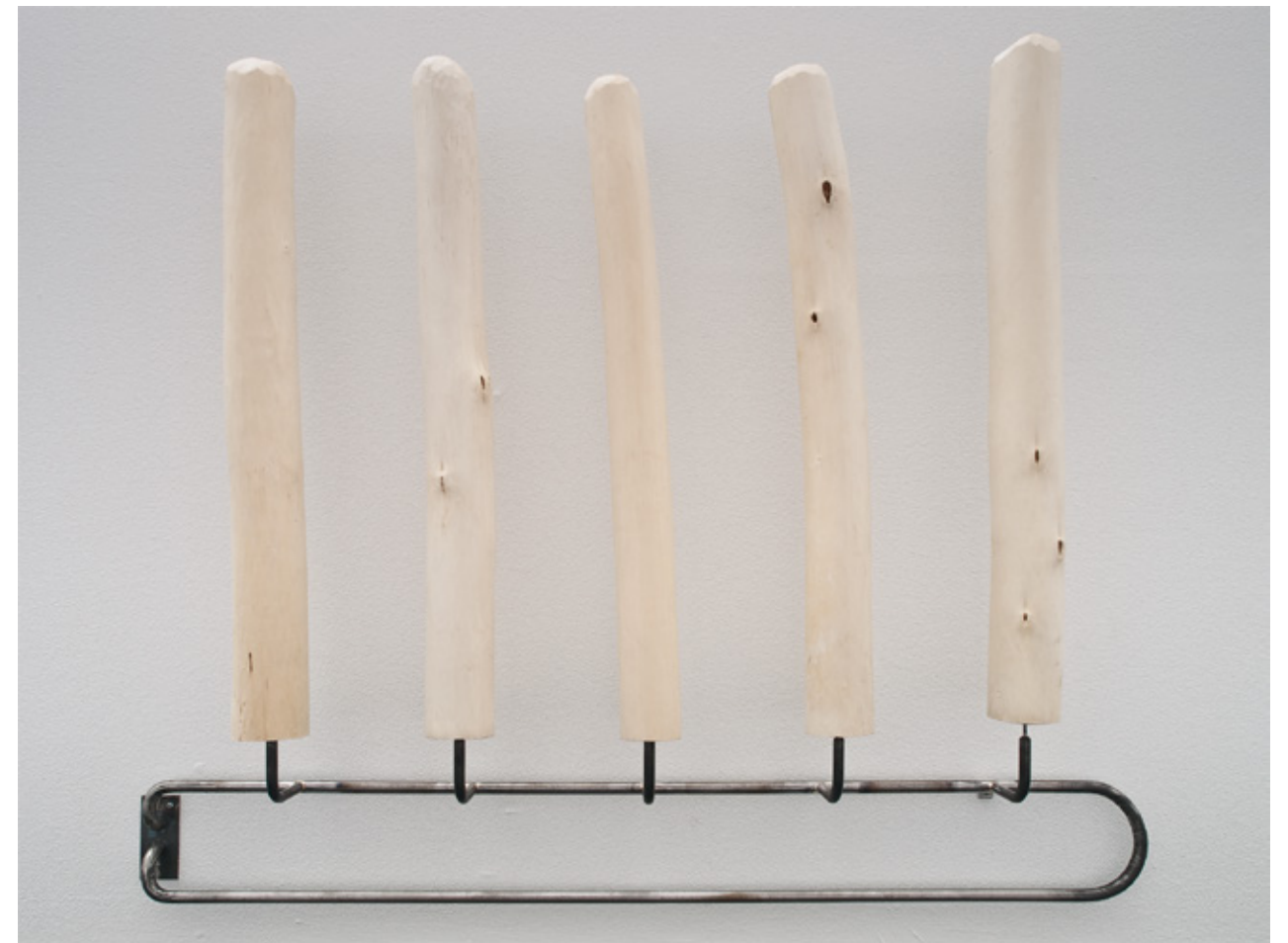


Untitled
 2013 Paint, aluminium, bronze 45 x 276 x 89 cm
Untitled
 2013 Paint, aluminium, bronze 47 x 175 x 84 cm





Pearls of circulation, 2012,
limestone, various metal, plaster, 8 parts, each approx. 14 x 16 x 15 cm



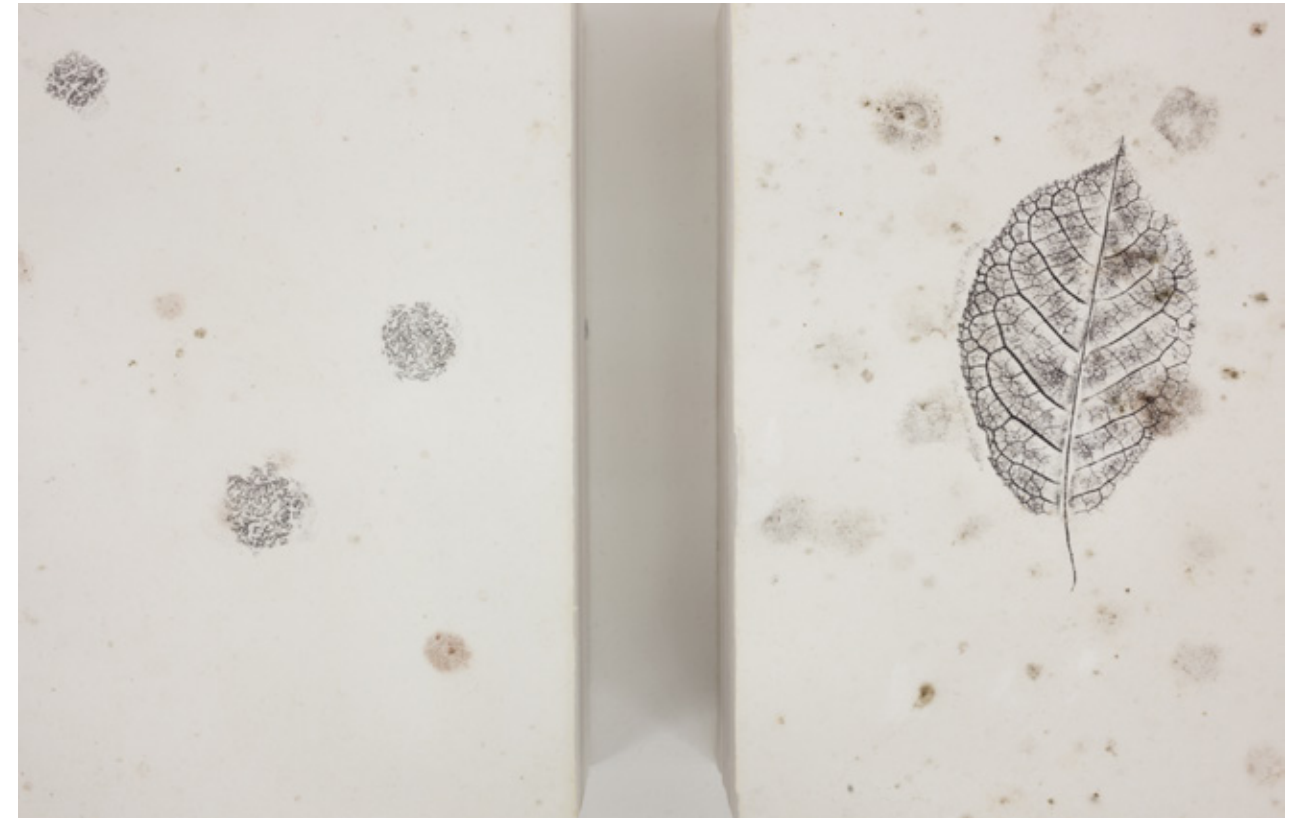
Five-Fold Hurrah 2009
Wood, iron 98 x 119 x 15 cm



Telluric Touch, 2015,
wood chips, steel, MDF, 2 parts: 47 x 50 x 20 cm, 40 x 50 x 15 cm



Few Things Reach the Surface, 2010
Plaster, rice paper, graphite, organic material 8 parts: 12,5 x 21,5 x 28 cm each



Few Things Reach the Surface (detail), 2010
Plaster, rice paper, graphite, organic material 8 parts: 12,5 x 21,5 x 28 cm each



Conjunction 1 (3), 1995
Bronze 95 x 120 x 150 cm



Den Den Den, 2013
Beaver cut wood, fibre mass, plastic
39 x 54 x 39 cm